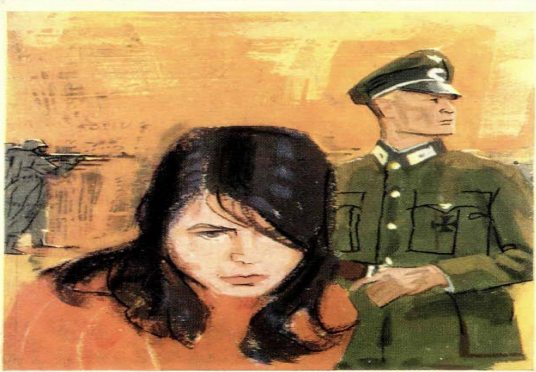
argosy

lovember

12 BRILLIANT STORIES

Including

Agatha Christie Saroyan Stan Barstow



Australia 3/6 New Zealand 3/6

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Vol. XXV No. 11 **Cover by Hants** **NOVEMBER 1964**

Over Now to You	*Decoration by Graham*	**2**
The Case of the Missing Will	**Agatha Christie** *Illustration by Fred Reynolds*	**4**
Big Granny	**Arturo Barea** *Illustration by John Groth*	**12**
Encounter	**Alberto Moravia**	**20**
It's Me, O Lord !	**William Saroyan** *Illustration by Louis Glanzman*	**26**
Five Star Flummery		**34**
Casual Acquaintance	**Stan Barstow**	**37**
Green Turtle	**Tom Macdonald** *Decoration by Miles Chance*	**44**
The Greaser's Story	**O. E. Middleton** *Decoration by M. Whittlesea*	**51**
Grape Fun	*Decorations by Biro*	**70**
Lacey	**Christian Miller**	**73**
Saluda Berkeley	**Phyllis Roberts** *Illustration by Mary Dinsdale*	**84**
Covent Garden	**Clemence Dane**	**94**
Never a Dull Moment	*Decoration by Porter-G*	**96**
Night in the City	**Brian Henry**	**99**
Seldom Seen	**John Sibly**	**113**
Anniversary	**Stephen Barr**	**123**
Man in a Corner	**Margaret Bonham** *Cover and Decoration by Hants*	**128**
Leisure-Pleasure	*Decorations by Bill Banks.*	**160**
Contributors : Jan Dehane, J. L. Delin, Keith Fletcher, John Baker White		
Argosy Crosswords		**167, 168**

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OVER NOW TO YOU...

THE announcement that a hundred electric garters were being given away as prizes in a *Why I Like XYZ Fruit Drink* contest gave us considerable food for thought.

Too many things nowadays are electric that needn't be. Toothbrushes, for instance, and typewriters. Electric toothbrushes will soon lead to hairbrushes, and paintbrushes. Then it'll be: *Do your Action Painting the Modern Way with a 2 kw. Vibrocamel . . . All these best-selling novelists typed their books on our battery portables* . . . Then it will be electric dustpans, flowerpots, *spoons* . . .

Electric garters really started us worrying though— Honi soit qui mal y (A.C. or D.C.) pense? We lay awake at night thinking about their use. Perhaps, on the female leg, they are intended to administer a warning shock to any intrusive male hand? Or do they give mild electric massage to sufferers from varicose veins or phlebitis?

It's true that the non-electric garter is a poor puny thing, no sooner bought than it starts to deteriorate, becomes wan and ravelled, and slithers down the calf. Garters, too, even worse than socks, have an infernal genius for disappearance, *singly;* somewhere in our house there must be a great heap of at least thirty single garters. If they could invent a magnetic garter, connected to a dry-battery worn on the belt, then at night when they were removed they would fly together like Pyramus and Thisbe. But there might be difficulty about walking . . .

Electric garters are bound, too, to lead to electric gaiters, and it's easy to see what will come of *that*: " Canon, Canon, please come quickly, something dreadful's happened to the Bishop! "

" What's happened, my boy? "

" He was christening Lady ffolly's baby and—and it splashed a bit in the font and—and his Grace was standing on the bronze memorial to Æthelburga—and his gaiters . . ." Let us draw a veil.

Now if only they'd invent electric socks, 1 kw. or 2 kw. according to the time of year, that would be really useful. But apart from that suggestion, thrown out to the leaders of the male fashion world, we consider that electricity is best kept in its place.

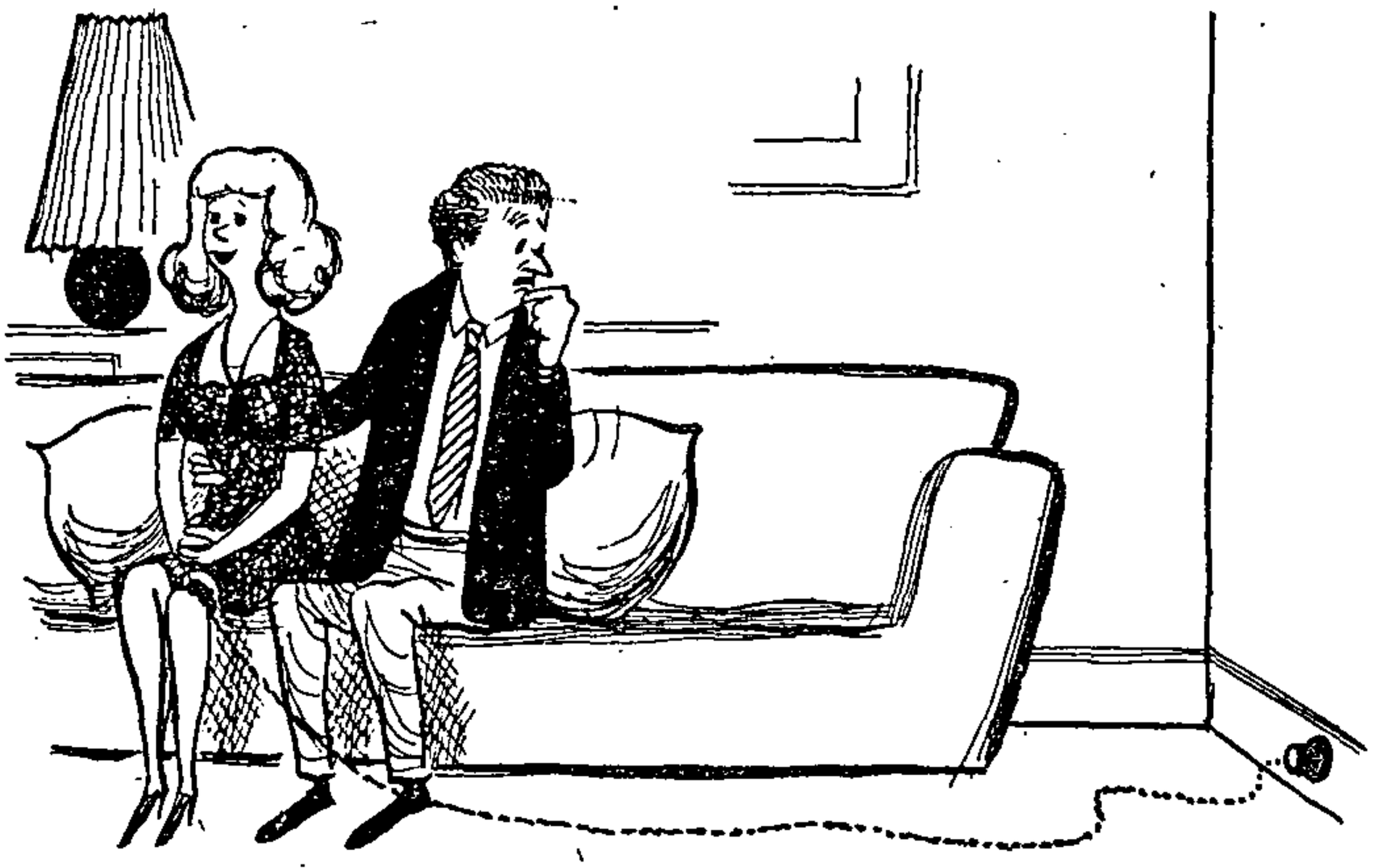
Only the other day a friend of ours was speaking on the telephone in a slight thunderstorm . . . Suddenly he found that he was sitting on the sofa with a half-smoked cigarette in his hand and no recollection of having moved there. His family were bustling about with wet compresses and told him that a ball of fire had darted down the line at him. Sure enough the receiver was in about thirty bits, and the G.P.O. official who came to look, told him that if he hadn't been wearing rubber-soled shoes he'd have been toasted like a hotdog. So, no electric garters for us, thank you, unless they are properly earthed.

Argosy is *never* going to be electrified; neither mains, battery, nor transistor will make it any heavier to carry; nor will you be able to buy Argosy and a cine-camera combined in one handy pack.

It couldn't be better value than the way it is.

P.S. Garters turned out to be a misprint for guitars.

The Back-room Boys



Just for fun, Argosy challenges you to solve the mystery that almost defeated Hercule Poirot.

THE CASE OF THE MISSING WILL

BY AGATHA CHRISTIE

THE problem presented to us by Miss Violet Marsh made rather a pleasant change from our usual routine work. Poirot had received a brisk and business-like note from the lady asking for an appointment, and he had replied asking her to call upon him at eleven o'clock the following day.

She arrived punctually—a tall, handsome young woman, plainly but neatly dressed, with an assured and business-like manner. Clearly a young woman who meant to get on in the world, and in spite of her good looks, I was not particularly prepossessed in her favour.

"My business is somewhat unusual, Monsieur Poirot," she began, "and I had better begin at the beginning."

"If you please, mademoiselle."

"I am an orphan. My father was one of two brothers, sons of a small yeoman farmer in Devonshire. The farm was a poor one, and the elder brother, Andrew, emigrated to Australia, where he did very well indeed, and by means of successful speculation in land became a very rich man. The younger brother, Roger—my father—had no leanings towards the agricultural life. He managed to educate himself a little, and obtained a post as a clerk with a small firm. He married slightly above him; my mother was the daughter of a poor artist.

"My father died when I was six years old. When I was fourteen, my mother died too. My only living relation then was my Uncle Andrew, who had recently returned from Australia and bought a small place, Crabtree Manor, in his native county. He was exceedingly kind to his brother's orphan child, took me to live with him, and treated me as his own daughter.

"But although kindness itself, he had certain peculiar and deeply-rooted ideas about the upbringing of women. Himself a man of little or no education, though possessing remarkable shrewdness, he placed little value on what he called 'book knowledge.' He was especially opposed to the education of women. In his opinion, girls should learn practical housework and dairy-work, be useful about the home, and have as little to do with book learning as possible. He proposed to bring me up on these lines, to my bitter disappointment and annoyance.

"I rebelled, frankly. I knew that I possessed a good brain, and had absolutely no talent for domestic duties. My uncle and I had many bitter arguments on the subject for, though much attached to each other, we were both self-willed. I was lucky enough to win a scholarship, and up to a certain point was successful in getting my own way. The crisis arose when I resolved to go to Girton. I had a little money of my own, left me by my mother, and I was quite determined to make the best use of the gifts God had given me.

"I had one long, final argument with my uncle. He put the facts plainly before me. He had no other relations, and he had intended me to be his sole heiress. As I have told you, he was a very rich man. If I persisted, I need look for nothing from him. I remained polite, but firm. I should always be deeply attached to him, I told him, but I must lead my own life. We parted on that note. 'You fancy your brains, my girl,' were his last words. 'I've no book learning but, for all that, I'll pit mine against yours any day. We'll see what we shall see.'

"That was nine years ago. I have stayed with him for a weekend occasionally, and our relations were perfectly amicable, though his views remained unaltered. He never referred to my having gone to Cambridge, nor to my degree. For the last three years his health had been failing, and a month ago he died.

"I am now coming to the point of my visit. My uncle left a most extraordinary will. By its terms, Crabtree Manor and its contents are to be at my disposal for a year from his death—'during which time my clever niece may prove her wits,' the actual words run. At the end of that period, 'my wits having proved sharper than hers,' the house and all my uncle's large fortune pass to various charitable institutions."

"That is a little hard on you, mademoiselle, seeing that you were Mr. Marsh's only blood relation."

"I do not look on it in that way. Uncle Andrew warned me, and I chose my own path. Since I would not fall in with his wishes, he was at liberty to leave his money to whom he pleased."

"Was the will drawn up by a lawyer?"

"No: it was written on a printed will-form and witnessed by the man and his wife who looked after my uncle."

"There might be a possibility of upsetting such a will?"

"I would not even attempt such a thing."

"You regard it then, as a sporting challenge on the part of your uncle?"

"That is exactly how I look upon it."

"It bears that interpretation certainly," said Poirot thoughtfully. "Somewhere in this rambling old manor-house, your uncle has concealed either a sum of money in notes or possibly a second will, and has given you a year in which to exercise your ingenuity to find it."

"Exactly, Monsieur Poirot; and I am paying you the compliment of assuming that your ingenuity will be greater than mine."

"Eh, eh! but that is very charming of you. My grey cells are at your disposal. You have made no search yourself?"

"Only a cursory one; but I have too much respect for my uncle's undoubted abilities to fancy that the task will be easy."

"Have you the will or a copy of it with you?"

Miss Marsh handed a document across the table. Poirot ran through it, nodding to himself.

"Made three years ago. Dated March twenty-fifth; and the time is given also—eleven a.m.—that is very suggestive. It narrows the field of search. Assuredly it is another will we have to seek for. A will made even half an hour later would upset this. Eh bien, mademoiselle, it is a problem charming and ingenious that you have presented to me here. I shall have all the pleasure in the world in solving it for you. Granted that your uncle was a man of ability, his grey cells cannot have been of the quality of Hercule Poirot's!

"Hastings and I will go down to Crabtree Manor tonight. The man and wife who attended on your uncle are still there?"

"Yes, their name is Baker."

The following morning saw us started on the hunt. We had arrived late the night before. Mr. and Mrs. Baker, having received a telegram from Miss Marsh, were expecting us. They were a pleasant couple, the man gnarled and pink-cheeked, like a shrivelled pippin, and his wife a woman of vast proportion and true Devonshire calm.

Tired with our journey and the eight-mile drive from the station, we had retired at once to bed after a supper of roast chicken, apple pie, and Devonshire cream. We had now disposed

of an excellent breakfast, and were sitting in a small panelled room which had been the late Mr. Marsh's study and living-room. A roll-top desk stuffed with papers, all neatly docketed, stood against the wall, and a big leather armchair showed plainly that it had been its owner's constant resting-place. A big chintz-covered settee ran along the opposite wall, and the deep low window-seats were covered with the same faded chintz of an old-fashioned pattern.

"'Eh bien, mon ami," said Poirot, lighting one of his tiny cigarettes, " we must map out our plan of campaign. Already I have made a rough survey of the house, but I am of opinion that any clue will be found in this room. We shall have to go through the documents in this desk with meticulous care. Naturally, I do not expect to find the will amongst them, but it is likely that some apparently innocent paper may conceal the clue to its hiding-place. But first we must have a little information. Ring the bell, I pray of you."

While we were waiting for it to be answered, Poirot walked up and down, looking about him approvingly.

" A man of method, this Mr. Marsh. See how neatly the packets of papers are docketed; then the key to each drawer has its ivory label—so has the key of the china cabinet on the wall; and see with what precision the china within is arranged. It rejoices the heart. Nothing here offends the eye—"

He came to an abrupt pause, as his eye was caught by the key of the desk itself, to which a dirty envelope was affixed. Poirot frowned at it and withdrew it from the lock. On it were scrawled the words: *Key of Roll-Top Desk*, in a crabbed handwriting, quite unlike the neat superscriptions on the other keys.

" An alien note," said Poirot, frowning. " I could swear that here we have no longer the personality of Mr. Marsh. But who else has been in the house? Only Miss Marsh, and she, if I mistake not, is also a young lady of method and order."

Baker came in answer to the bell.

" Will you fetch madame your wife, and answer a few questions? "

Baker departed and shortly returned with Mrs. Baker, wiping her hands on her apron and beaming all over her face.

In a few clear words Poirot set forth the object of his mission. The Bakers were immediately sympathetic.

" Us don't want to see Miss Violet done out of what's hers," declared the woman. " Cruel hard 'twould be."

Poirot proceeded with his questions. Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Baker remembered perfectly witnessing the will. Baker had

previously been sent into the neighbouring town to get two printed will-forms.

"Two?" said Poirot sharply.

"Yes, sir, for safety like, I suppose, in case he should spoil one—and sure enough, so he did do. Us had signed one—"

"What time of day was that?"

Baker scratched his head, but his wife was quicker.

"Why, to be sure, I'd just put the milk on for the cocoa at eleven. Don't 'ee remember? It had all boiled over on the stove when us got back to kitchen."

"And afterwards?"

"'Twould be about an hour later. Us had to go in again. 'I've made a mistake,' says old master, 'had to tear the whole thing up. I'll trouble you to sign again,' and us did. And afterwards master gave us a tidy sum of money each. 'I've left you nothing in my will,' says he, 'but each year I live you'll have this to be a nest-egg when I'm gone.' And sure enough, so he did."

Poirot reflected.

"After you had signed the second time, what did Mr. Marsh do? Do you know?"

"Went out to the village to pay tradesmen's bills."

That did not seem very promising. Poirot tried another tack. He held out the key of the desk.

"Is that your master's writing?"

I may have imagined it, but I fancied that a moment or two elapsed before Baker replied, "Yes, sir, it is."

He's lying, I thought. But why?

"Has your master let the house? Have there been any strangers in it during the last three years?"

"No, sir."

"No visitors?"

"Only Miss Violet."

"No strangers of any kind inside this room?"

"No, sir."

"You forget the workmen, Jim," his wife reminded him.

"Workmen?" Poirot wheeled round on her. "What workmen?"

The woman explained that about two and a half years ago workmen had been in the house to do certain repairs. She was quite vague as to what the repairs were. Her view seemed to be that the whole thing was a fad of her master's and quite unnecessary. Part of the time the workmen had been in the study; but what they had done there she could not say, as her master had not let either of them into the room while the work was in

progress. Unfortunately, they could not remember the name of the firm employed, beyond the fact that it was a Plymouth one.

"We progress, Hastings," said Poirot, rubbing his hands as the Bakers left the room. "Clearly he made a second will and then had workmen from Plymouth in to make a suitable hiding-place. Instead of wasting time taking up the floor and tapping the walls, we will go to Plymouth."

With a little trouble, we were able to get the information we wanted. After one or two attempts we found the firm employed by Mr. Marsh.

Their employees had all been with them many years, and it was easy to find the two men who had worked under Mr. Marsh's orders. They remembered the job perfectly. Amongst various other minor jobs, they had taken up one of the bricks of the old-fashioned fireplace, made a cavity beneath, and so cut the brick that it was impossible to see the join. By pressing on the second brick from the end, the whole thing was raised. It had been quite a complicated piece of work, and the old gentleman had been very fussy about it. Our informant was a man called Coghan, a big, gaunt man with a grizzled moustache. He seemed an intelligent fellow.

We returned to Crabtree Manor in high spirits, and locking the study door, proceeded to put our newly acquired knowledge into effect. It was impossible to see any sign on the bricks, but when we pressed in the manner indicated, a deep cavity was at once disclosed.

Eagerly Poirot plunged in his hand. Suddenly his face fell from complacent elation to consternation. All he held was a charred fragment of stiff paper. Otherwise the cavity was empty.

"Sacré!" cried Poirot angrily. "Someone has been before us."

We examined the scrap of paper anxiously. Clearly it was a fragment of what we sought. A portion of Baker's signature remained, but no indication of what the terms of the will had been.

Poirot sat back on his heels. His expression would have been comical if we had not been so overcome. "I understand it not," he growled. "Who destroyed this? And what was their object?"

"The Bakers?" I suggested.

"Pourquoi? Neither will makes any provision for them, and they are more likely to be kept on with Miss Marsh than if the place became the property of a hospital. How could it be to

anyone's advantage to destroy the will? The hospitals benefit—yes; but one cannot suspect institutions."

"Perhaps the old man changed his mind and destroyed it himself," I suggested.

Poirot rose to his feet, dusting his knees with his usual care.

"That may be," he admitted. "One of your more sensible observations, Hastings. Well, we can do no more here. We have done all that mortal man can do. We have successfully pitted our wits against the late Andrew Marsh's. But, unfortunately, his niece is not better off for our success."

By driving to the station at once, we were just able to catch a train to London, though not the principal express. Poirot was sad and dissatisfied. For my part, I was tired and dozed in a corner. Suddenly, as we were just moving out of Taunton, Poirot uttered a piercing squeal.

"Vite, Hastings! Awake and jump! But jump I say!"

Before I knew where I was, we were standing on the platform, bareheaded and minus our suitcases, while the train disappeared into the night. I was furious. But Poirot paid no attention.

"Imbecile that I have been!" he cried. "Triple imbecile! Not again will I vaunt my little grey cells!"

"That's a good job at any rate," I said grumpily. "But what is all this about?"

As usual, when following out his own ideas, Poirot paid no attention at all to me.

"The tradesmen's bills—I have left them entirely out of account. Yes, but where? Where? Never mind, I cannot be mistaken. We must return at once."

Easier said than done. We managed to get a slow train to Exeter, and there Poirot hired a car. We arrived back at Crabtree Manor in the small hours of the morning. I pass over the bewilderment of the Bakers when we had at last aroused them. Paying no attention to anybody, Poirot strode at once to the study.

"I have been, not a triple imbecile, but thirty-six times one, my friend," he deigned to remark. "Now, behold!"

There is the mystery of the missing will. Have you worked it out? It almost eluded even the great Poirot—but he just managed to solve it, as you can see on Page 33.

She kicked all the shins within her reach

BIG GRANNY

BY ARTURO BAREA

IF a man uncorks a bottle of vintage sherry and pours it down his gullet faster than the two o'clock Mass is read by a priest who has not yet broken his fast, he will get drunk like a pig and deserves to be put on water for the rest of his life. Yet this is just what I did once, and I would do it again in the circumstances, although I couldn't guarantee the same result. The years have left their traces.

It was all the fault of my grandmother, my father's mother, whom we used to call Big Granny, and the story has to be told as a lesson that should be taken to heart.

Big Granny was a countrywoman with a massive personality in every sense of the word. She was well over six foot, and proportionally big all round. I couldn't tell how much she weighed, but I can remember what happened when she insisted that a chemist should weigh her. She was always worried about my thinness, and each time she came to Madrid she would drag me willy-nilly to the chemist's shop run by an old suitor of hers, so that he could weigh me on his scales. One day she wanted to know her own weight, but the poor little man began to stutter in a flurry of apprehension, " Inés . . . these instruments are so delicate . . . I wouldn't dare to—" And though she ranted at him for a quarter of an hour he stuck to his guns, shaking his head like a marionette. At last we left the shop, the door slammed shut behind us, and we were no wiser than before. Grandmother dragged me along, pushing and elbowing her way through the dense crowd in the market place. The people she jostled let their words of angry protest die on their lips when they found themselves confronted with her bulk.

Suddenly she swivelled round, causing a new eddy among the shopping housewives, and stared at me accusingly, " And that

skinned tomcat wanted to become your grandfather! Only think of it! Lucky for you, I turned him down; if he'd married me, you'd never been born."

Big Granny loved to boast of my grandfather's vigour which had given her twenty-five children and, so she maintained, would have given her more if he hadn't died too soon. By the time of my story, however, most of the twenty-five were dead, and the rest lost in the wide world. My mother, the widow of her youngest son, and we four grandchildren were her only close kin within reach. Big Granny wanted to stay with us and help us along—at least, this is what she said; but my mother had other ideas, and our grandmother retired to her native village of Navalcarnero. There she amused herself with taking over the household of a winegrower with four ungovernable children—a devil's brood!—and a wife in the churchyard.

Navalcarnero is not far from Madrid, and Big Granny came to see us once every two or three weeks, to our great delight, since

she always arrived laden with gifts. They were rural gifts changing with the seasons: around September, a jug of sweet wine or grape juice syrup; when they'd killed a pig, sausages and black puddings, or a flitch of smoke-cured bacon; at Christmas, the traditional sweets; all through the summer, fruit; and the whole year round the marvellous doughnuts she would make herself. No wonder her grandchildren went to the railway station to meet her every time she announced her coming.

One day my sister and I went alone because our two brothers were working. My sister Concha had her stiff little plaits tied with red ribbons, and I wore my sailor's blouse. Normally, Concha jeered at this rig and dirtied the white collar with whatever she found handy; while I would take revenge by pulling off her beloved ribbons, and throwing them into a puddle. On that spring morning, however, we made a truce and walked quietly down to the station; we wanted our grandmother to see us looking clean and trim, for she had written that she would bring each of us a dozen of the moulded cottage cheeses called quesillos.

Concha started to lecture me, " You know those cheese moulds are little baskets made of rushes—the girls in the village weave them so tightly that only the whey runs out and the curds stay inside, and when they don't drip any more it's done."

I knew as well as she did how cottage cheeses were made, and saw through her design. " All you're after," I said, " is my moulds, but you won't get them." For the rest of our walk we did not speak a word.

The Central Station of the Line Madrid–Almorox–Villadelprado, to give it its full title, was tiny, quite in keeping with a railway on which the trains looked like toys, and took at least seven hours for a run of about sixteen miles. Although later on the Company went bankrupt, it had originally been a good idea to build a line by which the villages could send their wine, vegetables, grain, flour and sheep directly to Madrid. The trouble was that at first the villagers still had their carts and muleteers, so they were unwilling to spend money on rail transport; and by the time the line began to show profit, buses and lorries offered cheaper and faster services.

Anyway, when I was a small boy, the miniature terminus was new, clean, and bright with paint. The rails shone like silver. The glossy red coaches and green engines, glittering with burnished brass, were a joy to old and young. When the one and only passenger train of the day was signalled, the policemen on duty put on their green gloves and straightened their shakos; the

food-tax collectors, the Consumeros, as we called them, took up their posts on both sides of the exit; the porters and railway guards donned their braided cáps and fanned out along the platform.

We loathed the Consumeros. In those years, there was a duty on all eatables brought into Madrid, and on every road, at every terminus, the excise men lay in wait. They were armed with spikes like huge larding pins, which they used to prod bundles and haversacks so that nobody should smuggle in taxable goods.

That morning—goodness knows why—they tried to chase my sister and me out of the station, when we refused to show them our platform tickets, which they had no right to check anyway. The porters, called in by the two Consumeros had no right to see our tickets either, so we didn't show them. Only when a policeman came did we produce the tickets. But not quietly. We told him what we thought of the men with the spikes who had threatened to beat us. Who did they think we were? Little tramps?

By the time the arrival of the train was signalled we had staged the most beautiful brawl. First, the policeman had told the Consumeros to leave us in peace, as we had the right to be on the platform. The Consumeros had protested; why hadn't we shown them our tickets? Then Concha, my sister, informed them that she hadn't wanted to. The Consumero called her snotty, she called him a bully; and she kicked him on the shin, something she loved to do. Then the row started in earnest. The Consumero tried to hit her, the policeman stopped him, and goodness only knows how it would have gone if the train hadn't whistled just then, and the stationmaster with his bebraided cap hadn't appeared. With the greatest seriousness, he shouted, "Hey, everyone to his post, you slow-coaches!"

At last our grandmother turned up, carrying two huge baskets, and we hurled ourselves at her, "Have you brought our cheeses?"

She dropped her burden to the ground, and kissed us all over our faces. Then she bent down, lifted the corner of a white cloth, and let us see the twenty-four rush moulds, small, round, oozing the white cottage cheese.

"A promise is a debt, children!"

"Give me one—give me one!"

"No, my dears. You'll eat them at home. Now let's see if we get hold of a cab. My legs are a bit heavy nowadays."

When we came to the gate, the nearest Consumero snatched at the corner of one of her baskets. Big Granny did no more than waggle her hips, but it nearly knocked the man over, and she

raised her mighty voice, " Hoofs off, eh? . . . All right, all right, I don't feel like a row this time. In here's half a lamb and six pounds of salt pork. Oh, yes, and some cottage cheeses, but there's no duty on them. They're for the kids here."

Concha and I had giggled when the Consumero stumbled under our grandmother's weight, and he had given us a murderous look. As he now heard her speak of " the kids here," he said sharply, " What's that—no duty on the cheeses? Aren't they eatables? Fifty centimos duty a dozen. Otherwise they won't get into Madrid. For the kids or for the Holy Father, it makes no difference."

Big Granny turned purple in the face, mostly because the man has pushed her away from the gate and forced her to stay on the platform. But she still tried to keep calm.

" There's no duty on milk, and these quesillos are only milk, so they don't pay duty either."

" Never mind, they can't pass. This milk here—" I have never forgotten the term he then pronounced with the utmost solemnity—" is a manufact."

Big Granny roared, " And I'm going to manufact your nose! Milk, I've said, and milk it is. And the cheeses pay no duty because I won't let myself be robbed by a gang of rascals who're here only for plundering the poor. Do you think you can stuff yourself with them? The cheeses are for these kids here, for my grandchildren, and not for you! "

" They don't pass all the same. You'd better pay, lady—or whatever you are—if not, the goods will be confiscated."

" So that you can eat them, pretty boy? No, you'd get indigestion. And as to that lady or whatever, you must have been thinking of your mother, you babe-in-arms."

Meanwhile she had left her baskets on the ground. The Consumero opened his mouth for a retort, then he shrugged, and leaned over to seize one of them. At this Big Granny dealt him a blow between the shoulderblades so that he sat down abruptly.

" I've told you before—hoofs off! And don't try my patience too far."

The man rose, cursing and swearing, and lifted his spike, " If you weren't a woman . . ."

" If I weren't a woman, you'd have started running half an hour ago. But there's still time for it. And that's all."

Once more she picked up her two baskets and walked to the gate. The crowd let her through, and she said, " Now, children, go in front of me, and we shall see what these music-hall heroes are going to do."

Then everything seemed to happen at once: the second Consumero blocked the gate with his big body and shouted for the two policemen who had been stolidly looking on. The first Consumero clutched at Big Granny's arm. One policeman pushed his way through a cluster of people and stopped straight in front of her, the other was hanging on to the belligerent Consumero who had been thrown back into the crowd by a violent shove of grandmother's basket, and who now tried to assault his enemy. The Consumero at the gate, seeing the tussle, ran up to help either his mate or the policeman. Big Granny dropped her baskets once again and began to swing her enormous arms like a propeller until she was surrounded by empty space. My sister and I jumped up and down. She kicked all the shins within her reach; I trod on every foot within my reach. I was small and slight, but my boots were hobnailed—and I trod hard.

After a few seconds the place was a general battlefield. Most of the passengers who had come with the train were country people like our grandmother and came to her assistance. The tramps hanging around the station, and the neighbours from the nearest houses who had come to see the train arrive, all hated official authority and in particular the Consumeros. Grandmother had risen to the dignity of a heroine in their eyes. Meanwhile, the street arabs explored baskets and knapsacks behind the backs of their owners, whose attention was engaged elsewhere.

Suddenly the stationmaster strode up, behind him all the railway guards and porters he had been able to muster. He had the inspiration to chuck a fistful of detonators, the kind used as fog signals, on to the railway track, and the chain of crackling reports paralysed the people embroiled in the row. Most of them took to their heels.

Then the railwaymen made a cordon around us. The stationmaster addressed the policeman in his deep, powerful voice, an unlikely voice to come out of his sparse body, " What is all this noise? " With perfect poise he addressed Big Granny, " And you, madam, what is the matter? Quiet over there! This lady is a passenger of our Line, she is within the precincts of the Company, and therefore under its protection."

He struck them dumb. They gaped at him. Even Big Granny sounded subdued when she told her story, although her calm could not deceive Concha and me. When she finished, the stationmaster turned to the Consumeros, " It is a shame to interfere with a helpless woman, and you should be ashamed of yourselves! "

After all that had gone before, and in full view of my grand-

mother, whose head loomed high above the stationmaster's braided cap, his turn of phrase provoked an outburst of guffaws. But the man turned back to her, unperturbed, " They demand fifty centimos a dozen from you, isn't it so? Don't you worry, madam. The Company will pay this peseta for you." And he put his hand in his pocket.

Big Granny stopped him. " Very kind of you, but don't bother. It isn't a question of money, it's a question of one's rights. The cheeses are going to Madrid without paying duty, and they'll get there with me. Those rascals need a lesson. I'll take the cheeses in, all by myself and under their noses."

" You won't . . ." began the more aggressive of the two Consumeros.

Quietly, serenely, our grandmother took her two baskets which had miraculously escaped unscathed, and went to a seat on the platform, followed by a crowd that had formed anew. She sat down, lifted the white cloth from the rows of cheese, grasped one of the small rush baskets in her right hand, and shook its contents on to her left. She started eating.

Thus she emptied one mould after the other, eating without pause and without haste, while we were staring at her spell-bound. My sister was the first to gather her wits. She whispered into my ear, " She's going to eat the lot," and said aloud to Big Granny, " Give me one, please, Granny."

" No, dear. If anyone's to get a stomach-ache, it's me."

A chorus of children cried shrilly, " One for me . . . don't eat them all yourself, old meanie . . ." While a second chorus of women's voices intoned, subdivided into two groups, " That woman is capable of eating them all, and not one for the poor kids! " And, " She's right, it's her due—you either do a thing well, or you don't do it." But Concha and I had our eyes full of water.

When the last of the twenty-four cottage cheeses had disappeared in her mouth, Big Granny rose and shook crumbs and rush moulds from her skirt. Facing the speechless Consumeros, she patted her majestic stomach, " Well, pretty boys, do they pass or don't they? "

No one said a word or raised a finger. She walked to the gate, with us in her wake. Outside we found a cab. In a weary trot the horse took us away from the station. Concha and I were red-eyed and furious. From time to time, when she thought of her lost baskets, Concha hiccoughed.

Big Granny sat opposite us, very straight and rigid, but with a

faraway look in her eyes. Suddenly her face changed, and she burst into gusty laughter, so loud that the cabby turned his head.

" And because of that joke they forgot to make me pay duty on all the other stuff, and I forgot to pay it! " She opened a basket, gave each of us a luscious doughnut, and exhibited the many excellent things she had brought.

While we were giggling as if we had never shed a tear, she told us in her gruffest voice, " Let it be a lesson to you, you snivellers. If you behave as if you were all sugar and honey, the flies will eat you. And if you want to get on in life, don't let anyone tread on your corns. It's the only way to make 'em respect you, and then they may even let you get away without having paid up." Her great laugh shook the whole cab.

This is the reason why, some twelve years later, I poured a whole bottle of vintage sherry down my throat, under the noses of several angry but powerless French customs officials, and why —already on the outskirts of Paris—I woke from drunken sleep to look contentedly at the signs they had chalked up on my suitcases at the Spanish frontier, without even opening them. My fellow travellers made astonished faces; they had heard me snore for hours, motionless in my seat, and now failed to understand my sudden burst of laughter.

But why should I have told them the story of my Big Grandmother, she had been for many years at rest underground?

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Translated by Ilsa Barea

IT'S A HARD LIFE!

" It's no good giving up things you dislike," said Gladys " so I'm going to give up chocolates."

" In that case," sighed Muriel, " I shall have to give up cigarettes."

" I'm not going to be outdone by you girls," remarked Tom, " so I shall give up—er—sugar."

Each of them started their self-denial on the same day. After three days' abstinence Gladys became resigned, but she succumbed, finally, on a Tuesday. Muriel, who abstained for half as long again as Gladys, fell on a Wednesday. Tom, who abstained for twice as long as Gladys, threw in his hand on a Thursday, and was the only one of the three to hold out for more than a month.

For how many days did each of them abstain?

For baffled readers, the answer is at the foot of page 167.

Something had happened in that silence

ENCOUNTER

BY ALBERTO MORAVIA

AS they came close to the island, the outboard engine began spluttering and then stopped; the husband rose to his feet to restart it. His wife looked at the confused mass of buildings piled up on top of the highest part of the island and finally asked, "What's that castle?"

Her husband, busy with the engine, answered without looking up, "It's not a castle, it's a prison."

She noticed then that, above the towering buttresses, a grey wall rose against the sky with three rows of windows that appeared to be walled up. "The windows are blocked up," she said. "Why is that?"

"They're bócca di lupo windows."

"What does that mean?"

"It means," replied her husband with a touch of impatience, "that anyone inside the cells sees nothing but a little piece of sky, very high up."

"And why?"

Her husband inserted the lanyard into the engine and gave a vigorous jerk; but the engine, after a few revolutions, stopped once more. "Why? To prevent the prisoners making signals, I imagine."

The woman asked again, "And who is there in the prison?"

To her husband this seemed a particularly irritating question, owing no doubt to its quality of obviousness. He half straightened up, holding the lanyard, and said, "It's full of nice, honest people on holiday—original sort of people who prefer prison to a good hotel."

"Now you're teasing me," she said.

"But Laura, who would you expect to be there? Murderers, thieves, criminals of the worst kind." She turned away from the

Alberto Moravia is a true Roman in every sense. Because of his expansive, ironic prose, he is regarded as Italy's foremost contemporary writer—not only of novels—but also of film scripts for that voluble Neapolitan, Sophia Loren.

direction of the island, and crouched on the seat, offended.

The memory of an encounter of the previous year had come back to her. She had gone to the island by steamer with her husband, and had seen, coming out of a cabin and going ashore with the other passengers, a young man between two guards, his wrists loaded with chains; his handsome though arrogant face very pale, and with black curls encircling his forehead and temples. At the time she had not asked who the young man might be, although she had guessed; it had seemed to her that there was a tacit understanding between herself, her husband, and the other passengers to take no notice of him and even to pretend to be unaware of his presence. Yet he had remained in her memory, owing perhaps to the contrast between his good looks and the chains with which he was laden.

Now, thinking back, she regretted she had not asked for information—perhaps the young man had been condemned for life; but she was sure that it could not be for any of those hateful crimes that give rise to feelings of scorn, clearly he must have been sentenced for some crime of passion ordained, as they say, by fate. Suddenly she said, " Whenever you're behind an engine, whether it's the engine of the car or the engine of this boat, you become unreasonable." Her husband did not reply; but, having again inserted the lanyard, he gave it an even more violent jerk.

The engine started up, and the boat purred away over the calm water, leaving behind it a tenuous track that looked like a piece of white, evanescent lace upon the shot silk of the sea.

And now the boat, having passed beyond the rocky fortress, moved across in front of the island's harbour. The sun had not yet come into view on this side, and the red, yellow, and white houses along the quayside were still plunged in the subdued half light of early morning and looked as if uninhabited. The boat left the harbour behind and rounded a promontory. Neither the prison nor the harbour could now be seen, only a white, slanting shore crowned with vines and rising higher and higher in the distance. They went on for some way parallel with the

shore, then the engine started spluttering again and stopped.

The woman, annoyed, turned her back on her husband and looked towards the shore; she took no notice of the stifled curse he uttered as he rose to his feet to restart the engine. He made several attempts, while she continued, obstinately, to turn her back upon him; finally the boat started off in the direction of a little beach shut in between two high rocks, but when they arrived at a short distance from the shore, it stopped again. The woman heard her husband say, in a tone of irritation, " I don't know what's the matter . . . there must be something broken."

And, without turning round, she answered, " Let's go back to the harbour; you'll find a mechanic there."

" And what happens if we get stuck out at sea? No, I must get out here and go to the village."

She said nothing; she was accustomed to leaving matters of this kind to her husband; and besides, it did not in fact matter to her in the least that the engine refused to work. This indifference, which seemed to be proclaimed by her bent, bare back, exasperated her husband. " To you it doesn't matter in the least, does it?" he said. " It's *I* who will have to take that walk to the village."

She shrugged her shoulders very slightly, imagining that her husband would not notice. But her husband saw her and said, with the utmost irritation, " And don't just shrug your shoulders."

" I didn't shrug my shoulders."

" Yes, you did. For some time now I haven't liked the way you've been behaving."

" Oh, leave me in peace, you idiot." She realised that her eyes were full of tears, for some reason that she could not explain; and she twisted herself yet farther towards the shore, as though she were trying to see something. And she did, in fact, see a man in blue trousers and a white shirt coming quickly down a path from the top of the slope towards the beach. It was however a very brief glimpse; once he had reached the beach, the man vanished as if by enchantment. She wondered whether she ought to tell her husband of her strange vision, and then decided not to do so; but at the same time she realised that she had a guilty feeling—why, she did not know.

Her husband meanwhile had cast anchor, as she knew from the sound of the tackle and the plop in the water; then he said, " Well, shall we get out?" Mechanically she put her legs over the side of the boat and let herself slip into the water up to her knees, until she touched the sandy bottom with her feet. As she came out on to the black, damp shingle of the beach, she noticed,

in the wall of rock on her right, a dark cave that appeared to be deep; and she was suddenly sure that the man of whom she had caught a glimpse on the path was inside it. But she said nothing.

Her husband had now caught up with her; he took her arm and murmured, "Forgive me."

"*You* must forgive me," she replied with a lively feeling of hypocrisy, turning and giving him a smacking kiss on the cheek. Meanwhile she was thinking, If only he'd leave me alone.

Her husband, his serenity quite recovered, said, "You don't mind waiting for me? It'll take about an hour."

"Why, of course not," she answered; "it's so beautiful here." Her husband set off, climbing the path up the slope. Then she went and sat down on the beach, at some distance from the water, so that she could watch the cave without attracting attention.

For some time she remained motionless, sitting on the shingle, looking at the sea; then, almost imperceptibly, she turned her head in the direction of the cave and was surprised that her husband had failed to notice it. As she had guessed, the man was there, sitting on the ground inside the cave, his blue-trousered legs bent, his hands clasped round his knees. The upper part of his body and his head were not visible, partly owing to the deep shadow, partly because of a rock which jutted out across the opening. She looked at the hands intertwined over his knees, and all at once she was certain that he must be the young man whom she had seen in chains a year before; those were his hands, she recognised them, the hands which she had seen loaded with chains. She wondered whether she should speak to him and decided not to do so.

Something, she reflected, had started between them from the moment when she had seen him coming down the path and had not informed her husband, something that had happened in silence, that would continue in silence and would end in silence. Meanwhile the minutes were passing, the man did not move, and the impenetrable shadow that enveloped his face seemed to her to be the actual shadow, the mysterious, almost sacred shadow, of the misfortune which separated them and prevented them from communicating. She was aware, nevertheless, that the man's immobility troubled her, as if there existed between them a kind of challenge as to which of them should be the first to move and betray his own feelings.

Almost against her will, she suddenly made a gesture which seemed to her to give a name to her troubled feeling; she knew that she had pretty ears, round and small, so she raised her hand

and threw back her hair in such a way that the man could see one of them. But the man did not move; and she had a feeling of unreality, of irresponsibility, at the thought of having allowed herself to go so far as to flirt with a convict.

She started gazing at the sea again, profoundly troubled—more by her own feelings than by the presence of the man. She was now coldly determined to entice him out of the cave, even if he came out in order to attack or kill her. She recalled that there were a few objects of value in her bag, and slowly she drew them out—a gold cigarette-case, with a ruby in the clasp; a lighter, also of gold, with which she lit a cigarette. Finally, as though she were impatient, she fumbled again, found her watch, and looked at the time. The watch, also, was of gold, and she put it down on the shingle beside the cigarette-case and the lighter—a little heap of gold which, she thought, should be tempting to him. But she remembered having imagined that the man had been sentenced for a crime of passion, and she bit her lips; he would not be enticed by gold, something else was needed.

Her heart was beating very fast, she gasped for breath, she felt a deep blush mounting in waves to her cheeks: she raised her hand to her shoulder, grasped the shoulder-strap of her costume between two fingers and pulled it slowly down over her arm, until one breast was almost completely uncovered. Then she cast a wild glance in the direction of the cave: the man was still there, silent, motionless, his face invisible. She lowered her eyes to the useless little heap of gold on the shingle, and thence back again to the sea. Her gaze wandered at first to the horizon; then, moving closer, showed her the boat anchored in the dark, still water a short distance from the shore; and at last she understood what it was that the man was looking at, greedily, anxiously, from the deep shadow of the cave.

Slowly, lazily she rose to her feet and gently stretched herself, clasping her two hands at the back of her neck and throwing back her head. Then she moved down towards the water, saying to herself, "Good-bye." She did not go towards the boat but, walking on the sandy bottom, the water rising gradually over her body with an uncomfortable tickling sensation, she made her way towards the extreme end of the little bay, to the point where by rounding the rocky point it was possible to reach the adjoining bay. When the water came up to her throat, she threw herself forward and started swimming, drawing farther and farther away from the boat. She went round the rock, put down her feet on the bottom and, finally, turned.

It was no more than five minutes since she had looked back;

but the man was already in the boat. Bending down, with his back to her, he was busying himself with the engine. He was evidently an expert with outboard motor-boats; almost at once the engine started up and the boat moved off in a semi-circle; but, by a chance which seemed to her disastrous, everything happened without her being able to see his face. She stayed where she was, the water up to her chin, speechless, feeling that this silence was the final act of complicity between them. And now a thought tormented her. If the engine breaks down again, he'll think I wanted to entice him into a trap. At last she came slowly out of the sea and made her way to where she had left her bag.

The sun had come into view behind the cliff and shone brightly on the damp shingle, on the little heap of gold which the man had not touched, and on the blue expanse of the sea. She sat down beside her bag, and with her eyes followed the outboard motor-boat which appeared to be aiming straight towards the open sea.

To the right of the beach, from beyond the promontory, there suddenly appeared a launch with three men on board. The motor-boat went farther and farther into the distance, changing shape and growing smaller as it went; nevertheless she could clearly distinguish the man sitting in the stern, his hand on the tiller. Then, all of a sudden, it stopped, at the point where the smooth, almost transparent sea became ruffled and purplish blue. It had stopped and the man had risen and was now bending again over the engine. Meanwhile the launch was making resolutely for the motor-boat.

The woman saw what was going to happen and watched resignedly. The man remained standing for some time, intent on the engine, while the distance between the launch and the motor-boat visibly lessened; then he appeared to give up, sat down again in the stern and remained motionless. The launch was close to the motor-boat, now it was touching it.

The woman still watched: between the man and the three men in the launch, in the midst of the deserted sea glittering in the sunshine, a leisurely, peaceful conversation seemed to be taking place, as though they were trippers who had met by chance and knew each other. Anyhow, she reflected, the sunshine, the distance, the immensity of the sea and sky made this meeting insignificant, incomprehensible, remote.

Then the man stood up, and she saw him move from the motor-boat to the launch. She lowered her eyes and looked at her watch: almost an hour had gone by and soon her husband would be returning.

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IT'S ME O LORD!

BY WILLIAM SAROYAN

THE thing about the literary life that makes it a little crazy is the cigarettes that go with it, at least for the writers I know, the nervous writers, the keyed-up kids of forty, fifty, sixty, and seventy, and now Maugham's ninety, which is a lot more than most lawyers, for instance, get to be, and a lot more than perhaps Maugham himself ever imagined he would be likely to have the pleasure of becoming. These keyed-up kids who live the literary life come and go, or come and stay, or come and go and then come and stay and then come and go again, and finally something rather extraordinary happens: it turns out that nobody really noticed that they had come and gone, even if for a while they enjoyed great fame.

All of a sudden it's somebody else being fussed over, and the fellow who had sat alone for so many years getting out one book after another, getting reviewed on the front page of *The New York Times Book Review*, getting his face on the cover of *Time*, painted

by Artzybasheff, getting himself highly regarded in the best circles, getting the severest critics to take him seriously, this lad of the literary world all of a sudden is an old gent, his books are too long, there are too many words in them for what the words say, and even he himself knows this. It's a kind of rude thought to come so late in life, so near the end. Should he kill himself, to give his going a little style or a little arrogance? Or should he forget it?

He can still open a fresh pack of cigarettes, and take one out, and put a match to the end of it, and inhale deeply and say to himself, who by then has got to be a total stranger, " Now, let me see, what was it I had in mind? What was it I believed I ought to accomplish as a writer? It was only a moment ago I decided what it was, so what was it? Wasn't I supposed to accomplish something rather special? If it *was* fifty years ago, did I make it, or was the *Time* cover and feature a mistake? Was I the writer they should have fussed over the way they did, or was that only part of the policy of the magazine to provide its readers with a little amusement? If so, why did I let them do it? What did I want? "

The literary life is a good life, it's certainly as good as the medical life, the legal life, or the political life. It may even be as good as the religious life and the scientific life. The question is, is it life?

The answer is, Bet your life it's life. *If the literary life isn't life, no life is life,* because those larger-than-life shadows that moved north, or west, or whichever way it happened to be, and then disappeared, they all turn out to have belonged to nobody at all unless somebody *wrote* about who they belonged to. If the name and address aren't put to paper by somebody, whoever that was, whatever it was that he did, whatever it was that he thought, all of it is no more now than a swift-moving shadow that is gone forever.

I, a shadow, not more of a shadow than anybody else who is still a shadow, was thinking about all this when I got up at five o'clock this morning, eager to get under the shower, into my clothes, and upstairs for six cups of coffee, and as many cigarettes. I was alive in the literary life early this morning, thinking about the whole big day ahead, and the uses I might find it possible to make of the day. It made me feel good.

Now, I really don't mind being scorned by the front page of *The New York Times Book Review*, I don't mind at all actually, except that it very nearly drives me crazy every time I remember that so far *The New York Times Book Review* has never put one

of my books on its front page, and *Time* has never had my head—a rather handsome head too—on its cover, along with a big story all about the extraordinary character I am, the way it has done with so many other writers, and where are they now? I'm here, where are they? And I don't necessarily mean the ones who are dead, God love them. I mean the ones who are the big ones, the highly regarded ones, the ones who have had the best critics write whole books about their stuff, and have had six or seven earnest biographies written about them, and have won all of the prizes there are, one by one. Where are they?

I'm here in San Francisco, looking every bit as old as I am, looking frequently a lot older than my fifty-five years, but still getting up a long time before daybreak, shaving, showering, singing, making dirty cracks about a lot of things I've grown accustomed to, getting on the scale to confirm that a lot of lard is loaded all over my bones.

I am now five feet nine, or almost five feet nine, and I lug around a hundred and eighty pounds.

And then I get upstairs and fix myself a pot of coffee and I have at it, living the literary life all the while, remembering, thinking, planning, and lighting one new cigarette after another, enjoying every one of them, every puff of every one of them, but always, always not sure I ever worked hard enough, or learnt as much as I should have learnt, especially about the biological aspects of living matter, not sure I shouldn't have learnt French, at least, not to mention Russian, Hebrew, and Chinese. And what about my inventions? Why did I neglect them? And my music, what the hell happened to my symphonies? I can still light a cigarette all right, but what about what I might have done and didn't do, and how much time do I have left? Will somebody let me know how much time I have left?

Is it that I am getting more and more scared about dying, or at any rate more and more aware of the probability of it, the probability of something which only thirty years ago I frequently believed was never actually going to happen? Die? Why should I die, of all people, with all of my work to do? Why me, just because it happens to be inevitable?

Is it me, or was it ever me? The reason I ask is that when I was in Russia in 1960 I paid a few pennies for a collection of short stories by English and American writers, and among the writers was an English one by the name of A. E. Coppard, whose name I had known for a long time but without knowing his actual writing, which I finally found to be absolutely wonderful in a very real way, not *this* way, which is also a very real way,

certainly my way, or one of my ways, although a little troublesome for a lot of readers.

I've lost more readers by writing troublesome stuff in a troublesome style, most likely, than I ought ever to have permitted myself to lose, but the hell with them, if they don't want my writing, I don't want their reading, and I'm perfectly satisfied to have them read whoever the hell they like.

The stories by A. E. Coppard that I read in Russia made a powerful impact on me, much more powerful than the impact made by the other writers in the book, who were all good writers, earnest writers, men who had also lived the literary life, but whose stories I found impossible to read. I found it possible to *start* reading them, but after about fifty words, I'd had it. I knew I wanted no more of it. And I was surprised—I find it rather pleasant still to be surprised now and then by something or other—that A. E. Coppard had written such good stories when I for my part hadn't read his stories, and then he had died; and one day in Moscow at one of the big bookstores I found the shelf where the books in English are, and I found a collection of stories by a lot of English and American writers, and among these stories I found three by A. E. Coppard, and I read them, and was delighted and surprised.

The first thing I wanted to do was find a biography of him, because I wanted to know who he was and how it had been for him. Well, there didn't seem to be a biography. When I got back to Paris I looked him up at the American Library on the Champs Elysee Elysesse—all of a sudden I can't spell it, so the hell with it. I looked him up at the American Library on that big boulevard in Paris, and what they had was his autobiography, which I would rather read any day than a biography, and the point I am getting to is the name he had given it:

It's Me, O Lord!

Man, that pleased me, that made me admire A. E. Coppard more than ever. That struck me as being the best title anybody could ever give his own story, and so of course I wanted to get the book right away and read it, which I did.

But the question is this: *Was* it him, O Lord? *Is* it me, O Lord? I *think* it is, I think it was, but the longer I linger the less I can be sure.

A. E. Coppard was a runner as a young man. That's going to seem confusing perhaps to some people because hardly anybody anywhere is ever a runner, let alone a man who is soon going to start living the literary life. A. E. Coppard as a young man ran

in races, distance races as a rule, for money or for prizes, and a number of his stories are about young fellows who were runners, and these young fellows almost never won. They just ran, they just liked to run. In his autobiography there was a photograph of him in his running trunks. There was? There is. The book is still around, although out of print.

He's just a kid, maybe eighteen or nineteen, with a lean face that is full of humour and kindness and what I am going to take the simple liberty of calling innocence, because there is nothing else to call it. He's got very thick black hair, but this is the important thing about him in that photograph: he's on his mark, and ready to go. A. E. Coppard started his literary life as a runner. To me that means a lot, that's really great. How did a beautiful thing like that ever happen? Did it happen to any other writer, ever? Perhaps to a Greek long ago? Or was he himself a Greek long ago?

It's Me, O Lord! he called his story: he didn't call it, It's A. E. Coppard, O Lord. It's me, that's all. If *You* don't know me, who the hell does?

I ran, too, of course, but he ran as a way of life, and I'm surprised that I didn't, although it may have been only because there weren't any races of that kind in Fresno, in the San Joaquin Valley, in California, when I was there. I also rode a bicycle, but as a telegraph messenger, not in races, although I had a bicycle-rider who rode in long-distance races in one of my plays, one of my unknown plays, I might say, the one called, *Don't Go Away Mad.*

A. E. Coppard was a great fellow, it is an honour to belong to more or less the same mystic order that he belonged to, to be one who also lived, who lives the literary life. And then years later another Englishman wrote a rather wonderful novel, I've heard, called—well, the name of the novel is one of the best I have ever seen: *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, and the name of the writer is Alan Sillitoe.

When Alan Sillitoe had been a young man he had read a novel of mine called, *The Human Comedy*, and then when he was no longer a young man he reviewed a paperback edition of the book for one of the better London weeklies, and among other things Alan, a total stranger to me, said the novel just didn't hold up, there was something unfortunate in it, something bogus, something wrong, something possibly clever, something unsatisfying. And this hurt me, really hurt me, because when he had been young, when he had first read the novel, he himself in his review said he had been moved by it, it had meant something to him,

but after a number of years, perhaps no more than ten, when he read it again, it was no good.

Now how did that happen? What had changed, and whatever it had been, had it changed for the better? I was so hurt I wrote to the weekly and said yes, it's true, what Alan Sillitoe said about the novel was true, but there it was, I was stuck with it. The letter appeared in the weekly, and that was that—but not quite. Had I done right? Had I had the right, even, to say that what Alan Sillitoe had said *was* true? Well, perhaps I did, because the fact is that I myself regretted some of the stuff in *The Human Comedy*, especially near the end.

All the same I kept wondering if I had done right in writing and saying so. I didn't defend the book, I didn't try to justify the bad writing in it, which wasn't actually bad writing at all, the writing was all good, all simple and straight, it was something else that wasn't good, and it was this that I was stuck with. The good writing near the end of the story lied. Nothing is more painful than a lie, to tell, to have told, to have been told by somebody else, especially somebody who shouldn't lie.

And only thirteen short days ago, late at night, at a little bar just off Place Pigalle owned and operated by a half-Scots lady named Jennie, one of my favourite ladies in all of Paris, I was drinking brandy at three in the morning when over the juke box came an American song that I had first heard in Fresno as a kid, called (and don't laugh just yet), *Are You Lonesome Tonight?*

The singer was Elvis Presley, one of the greatest of the singers, although much maligned. After singing the first verse, Elvis Presley does something like a recitative, in which he speaks words, and one of the thing he says to this girl is that— Honey you lied. Elvis Presley says these few words, these banal and unacceptable words, with so much earnestness, so much astonishment, pain, honesty, and art that the words are suddenly not banal at all, but magnificent, and not unacceptable, but welcome. He says them as if to God himself, to the world itself, life itself, after which he goes on to say the equivalent of, But I would rather have you and your lies than anything else in the world. And again it's as if he is talking to the verities, the enormities, the unverifiable verities, and the very probably terribly small enormities. And so I had to have the juke box play the song six more times before I was willing to say good night and go on down the hill to my ice-cold house in Paris.

I call it my house, although it's actually the fifth-floor flat of this two hundred year-old building in which or near which

George Sand and Chopin had lived, and the Goncourt brothers had entertained other Frenchmen who were living the literary life, including my favourite of them all, because he taught me so much, Guy de Maupassant, and the hell with the rest of them. They were all good writers, highly regarded, famous, important, and these days almost impossible to read unless you insist on it for one reason or another, as I frequently do. The good writing near the end of the novel Alan Sillitoe had liked as a kid but had not liked ten years later, give or take one or two, lied, but I certainly never had in mind that it should, so was it me, O Lord?

I don't know, and while it *seems* to be me, right now, how long *is* now, ever? Almost twenty-five years ago, sometime in 1939, I believe, I went into Lindy's on Broadway late one night in New York and sat down with Leonard Lyons, and after a little while Oscar Levant, the famous neurasthenic piano player came and sat with us, and we got to talking, because we always do—that's one thing we always do, especially when we are at a table—and all of a sudden Oscar said, "Why do you always write about yourself?"

"Me?" I said. "Write about myself? Isn't the question, rather, 'Why do I always write about you?'" Which impelled Oscar to laugh the way he laughs, which is a way nobody else in the world has, as if laughing were even more painful, or maybe even more disgraceful, than crying. And Leonard Lyons scribbled on a pad.

I don't know, I don't mind living the literary life, I live it the best way I know how. For instance, less than five hours ago I had a manuscript of a short story to mail to an editor in New York. The rain had stopped, so I walked a mile downhill most of the way to the post office, and then I walked to the ocean, as I always like to do in San Francisco, and on the way I found a penny dated 1963, which was last year. But that wasn't enough, and only six blocks later I found another penny, this one dated 1959. Finding two pennies on one walk is a very literary thing, and to me very meaningful. Well, if it isn't especially meaningful, if it had no meaning at all in fact, it certainly makes me feel good. I don't know why, and probably don't really need to.

Later on I found a rather good nail, too, and of course on the beach I found a lot of pebbles, and brought them home. Why? Because the pebbles were there. Or rather because I was there, and I saw them, and loved them, and needed them, and picked them up, and put them in my pocket, and now have them, and am looking at them, in water in a jar, only pebbles but alive, and no lie, no lie at all.

And that's it, so who is it about? Me? Or you? Or who? I'll be damned if any of that is any of my business. My business is to go on living the literary life until there is no more of it left to live, no daybreak to beat to the world, no coffee to make and drink, no cigarette to light and smoke, no thought to think, no joke to tell, no laugh to laugh, no truth to tell, and certainly no lie, no lie at all either to tell or to be told. © William Saroyan 1964

THE CASE OF THE MISSING WILL

BY AGATHA CHRISTIE

Amateur sleuths (*see page* 11) *and read on:*

Going straight to the desk Poirot drew out the key, and detached the envelope from it. I stared at him stupidly. With great care he cut open the envelope, laying it out flat. Then he lighted the fire and held the plain inside surface of the envelope to the flame. In a few minutes faint characters began to appear.

"Look, mon ami!" cried Poirot in triumph.

I looked. There were just a few lines of faint writing stating briefly that he left everything to his niece, Violet Marsh. It was dated March twenty-fifth, 12.30 p.m., and witnessed by Albert Pike, confectioner, and Jessie Pike, married woman.

"But is it legal?" I gasped.

"As far as I know, there is no law against writing your will in a blend of disappearing and sympathetic ink. The intention of the testator is clear, and the beneficiary is his only living relation. But the cleverness of him! He foresaw every step that a searcher would take—that I, miserable imbecile, took. He gets two will-forms, makes the servants sign twice, then sallies out with his will written on the inside of a dirty envelope and a fountain-pen containing his little ink mixture. On some excuse he gets the confectioner and his wife to sign their names under his own signature, then he ties it to the key of his desk and chuckles to himself. If his niece sees through his little ruse, she will be thoroughly welcome to his money."

"She didn't see through it, did she?" I said slowly. "It seems rather unfair. The old man really won."

"But no, Hastings. It is *your* wits that go astray. Miss Marsh proved the astuteness of her wits and the value of the higher education for women by putting the matter in *my* hands. Always the expert. She has amply proved her right to the money."

I wonder—I very much wonder—what old Andrew Marsh would have thought!

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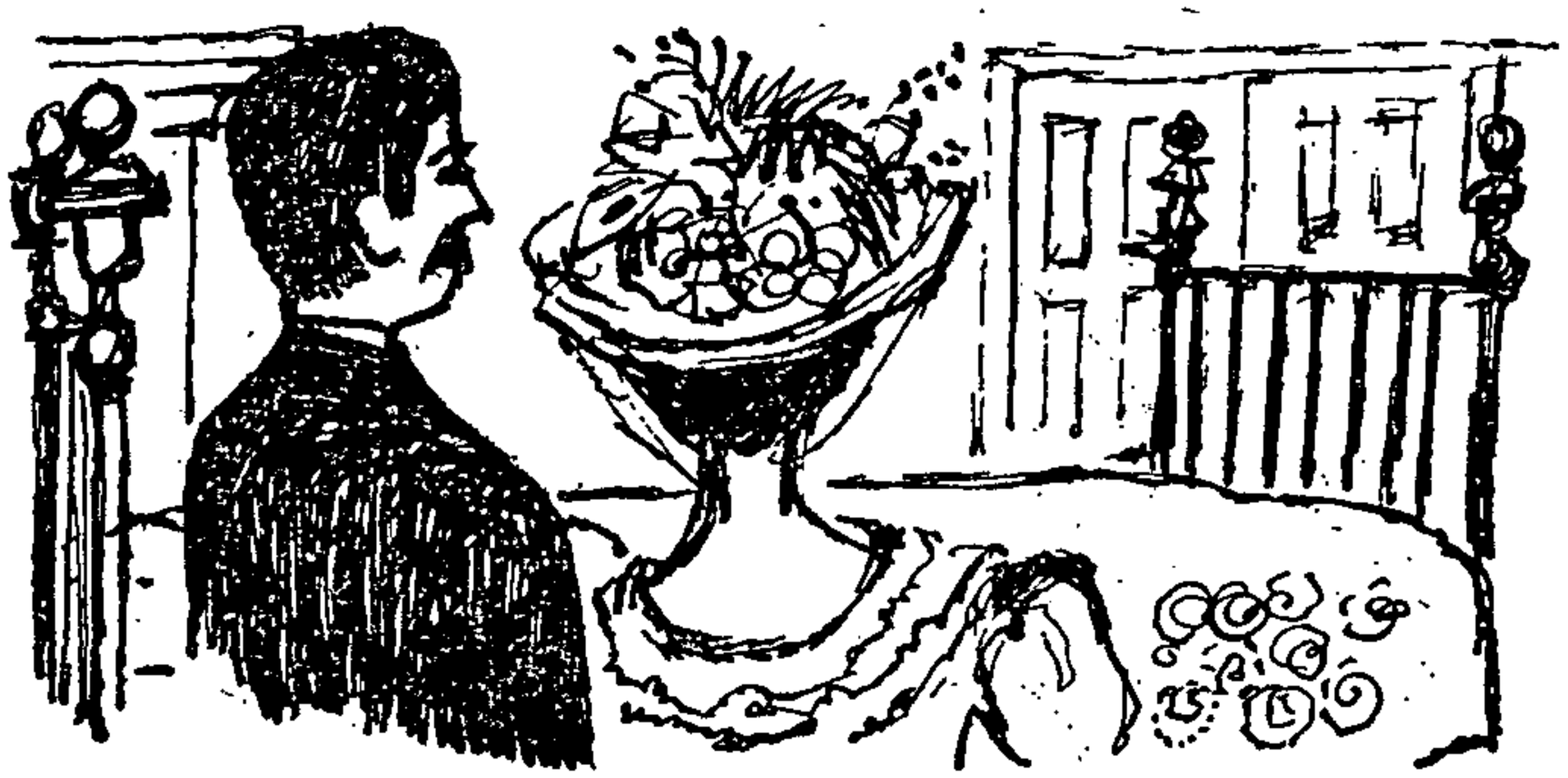

five star flummery

We shall be highly comfortable and select at the Gaierty said Bernard . . . Just then they stopped at the gay hotel and Ethel was spellbound at the size of the big hall—Bernard poked his head into the window of the pay desk. Have you a coupple of bedrooms for self and young lady he enquired in a lordly way.

A very handsome lady with golden hair and a lace apron glanced at a book and hastilly replied Oh yes sir two beauties on the 1st floor number 9 and 10.

Thank you said Bernard we will go up if you have no objection.

None whatever sir said the genial lady the beds are well aired and the view is quite pleasant . . .

They went upstairs and entered number 9 a very fine compartment with a large douny bed and white doors with glass handles leading into number 10 an equally dainty room but a trifle smaller.

DAISY ASHFORD, *The Young Visiters*

Stable d'Hôte

Now should it so chance
That you're going to France
In the course of next spring, as you probably may,
Do pull up and stay,
Pray,
If but for a day,
At Dover, through which you must pass on your way,
At the York—or the Ship—where, as all people say,
You'll get good wine yourself, and your horses good hay.

REV. R. H. BARHAM, *The Ingoldsby Legends*

Don't Mention It

He had reached the fourth floor, when a trifling event happened such as can happen only in the multiple existence of a large hotel. He heard a door open behind him and a low shriek. He turned and saw a young, dark woman, a white bath-towel wrapped round her body, which was dripping with water.

"Fire!" she breathed, scarcely audible, hoarse in her terror.

He stepped very quickly in front of her through the doorway. Before him, the open door of a bathroom full of steam, and bright in the steam a great blaze arising from the glass-topped table which stood in the same spot in every bathroom. The flame, a couple of feet high, waved in a draught set up between the open window of the bathroom and the open door of the suite. The origin of the conflagration was a spirit-lamp, and its fuel a newspaper or several newspapers.

He seized the spirit-lamp, very hot to touch, and flung it with a single movement into the bath, which was half full of steaming soapy water. It sizzled for a fraction of a second and sank into the depths. Then he snatched at a face-towel and crushed the burning newspaper to extinction.

"All right now," he said with the calm of a consciously superior being, to the young woman who was cowering in the lobby as if to hide her bodily shame.

ARNOLD BENNETT, *Imperial Palace*

Bootless to Boot!

Why go to Paris, you travelling swells
When you've never had fun in our country hotels?
There isn't a bath, and the bell doesn't ring,
But you don't come to Britain for that sort of thing

Come to Britain! The rooms are so old
And so picturesque that you won't mind the cold.
The bed's over there
and the light's over here;
Don't put out your boots if you want them this year;
The maid has a beard, the cold mutton perspires,
But come to Britain and visit the Shires.

Some of you find that Mentone is dull—
Come over and try a wet Sunday in Hull.
Take luncheon in bed, and get up when you dine,
But order your hot-water bottle for nine.

A. P. HERBERT, *Come to Britain*

Cutting a Dash

Suddenly Harry caught her and pressed her head down upon his shoulder. " Lottie! Lottie! You know it can't stop here! "

" Don't! "

" Don't what? I must speak out. You're not happy at the Leopold, Lottie, with all your money and all your gaiety. It's a great, bloated, red, blood-sucking spider that's taking the life out of you. It's driving you—forgive me for saying it—to drinking . . . Leave it! Cut yourself free! "

" Have I only a hotel to leave? " she sobbed . . .

" The heart of life isn't money . . . it's adventure and love and, Lottie, we can have both of these together! Slip away with me tomorrow. We'll make a dash for it in the Newhaven boat."

D. L. MURRAY, *Regency*

Do you remember an Inn
Miranda?
Do you remember an Inn?
And the tedding and the spreading
Of the straw for a bedding,
And the fleas that tease in the High Pyrenees,
And the wine that tasted of the tar?
And the cheers and the jeers of the young muleteers
(Under the vines of the dark verandah?)
Do you remember an Inn, Miranda,
Do you remember an Inn?

HILAIRE BELLOC, *Tarantella*

Trials and Tribulations

" Well the hotel, as you see, is a sort of silent film of Tchekhov," the girl said. " Golly, they are incredible. Do you see that old man over there sitting with his feet on a hot brick? Oh, he's gone —but you can see the brick if you lean this way. Half of them have bricks at meals." James laughed. " And of course there's never anyone in the bureau, the chamber maids wear shawls round their shoulders all day long, and the water in your basin makes you smell of sulphur . . . Which building are you in?

" I've no idea," said James, still laughing.

" Oh—well. There's not much to choose, anyway. We've tried all three. In the one across the square you have a bathroom and about three hours sun, and the radio from that restaurant place drives you mad; in this one you have no bath unless you go down to the établissement, and only about two hours sun—and in the middle one you get four and a half hours sun and no bath at all . . ."

ANN BRIDGE, *Frontier Passage*

I'd wanted her for a long time . . .

CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE

BY STAN BARSTOW

I WAS twenty that autumn. It was quite simple the way it happened. I noticed her for the first time on the bus on my journey home from the office one Friday afternoon and fell in love with her on the spot. I pointed her out with studied casualness to my friends Larry and Peter, but neither of them knew her.

I thought about her all the weekend and looked out for her every afternoon of the following week. But it wasn't until Friday that I saw her again; for although this was the only afternoon my office closed at five, she evidently travelled at the same time every day. So I watched for her on the one day only and a Friday without my seeing her left me downcast for days, my spirits rising only when the weekend was well behind and another Friday approaching fast.

For weeks I was content just to look at her: to get on to the bus, my heart racing with excitement at the possibility of seeing her and, if it was a lucky Friday, taking a seat from which I could observe without being noticed and gazing at her all the way into town. In the bus station, where we both alighted, I'd stand and watch her cross to her connection, small, straightbacked, with a poise that singled her out from her contemporaries—and a slight haughtiness in the set of her head and the cool glance of brown eyes in a heart-shaped face that chilled in me any notion of a brash approach, a high-handed sweeping aside of the formalities that stood between us.

One Friday afternoon she was talking to another girl as I boarded the bus and brushed past her. I heard her addressed as Joyce. It excited me to have a name by which to think of her. It identified her and it made me determined to find out still more about her.

That same afternoon I followed her across the bus station and

got on to the same bus. It took us out to the other side of town. An acute fear of appearing conspicuous stopped me from following her to her door, but I watched where she alighted, and at the next stop I jumped off myself and caught a bus back into town. Now I knew her first name and roughly where she lived, and as I rode home I thought that with this increase in my knowledge of her the time was surely approaching when we should meet and really know each other. As it was now, I thought with sudden gloom, she was probably not even aware of my existence, let alone my feeling for her.'

As the weeks passed by with no progress made I began, on the evenings when I could leave my studies, to take long walks into the district where she lived. I'd get off the bus and stroll up the road which wound away over the hill and into the next valley. On the brow of the hill I'd stop for a while, leaning on the wall and looking out over the dark forest of chimneys at the lights of the town.

Away in the distance, on my left, I could see the lighted windows of a huge mill working the night shift. It seemed to me like a great ship floating on a sea of night; full of souls, hundreds of people, whom I would never see and never know. I thought then of the wonderful chance that had singled out Joyce for me; and it seemed to me in some way pre-ordained that that same chance would eventually bring us together. I was sure of it.

From the top of the hill I wandered back through sidestreets and looked at the curtained windows of strange houses and wondered if she was inside, living her life. On all these rambles through the lamplit streets, which though strange at first soon became familiar to me, I cherished vague dreams of coming suddenly face to face with her and having the right words to say. But I didn't see her once. I went on, living in a kind of suspense, loving her from a distance, waiting for the miracle that would bring us together. Until Christmas was only a fortnight away. And then it happened.

On that Saturday, two weeks before Christmas, I was in town, pressing through the throngs of shoppers, choosing presents for my family. I was looking at socks in a department store when she turned her head and showed me her dear face three counters away. I forgot my own errands at once and made my way towards her. I had no idea of accosting her but as she moved on, absorbed in her own shopping, I followed behind. She was by herself.

I kept her in sight all round the store until, at last, with her

shopping bag and basket both filled, she made for the door. Alarmed then at the thought of losing her on the busy street, I pushed forward until I was immediately behind her.

I was so close I could have reached out and touched her at the moment the handle of her bag broke and the contents spilt out on to the floor. She gave an exclamation of annoyance, and before I realised it I was down on my hands and knees picking up packages and putting them back in the bag.

"There." We looked at each other as I straightened up, and I was chilled by the lack of recognition in her eyes and in a curious way astounded that she couldn't tell simply by looking at me that I'd been yearning for her all winter.

She thanked me and held out her hand for the bag, which I was holding under my arm.

"Please let me carry it for you." I motioned to her basket. "You can't carry them both; this handle's useless now."

"It's very kind of you." Her voice was doubtful, and I said, "I can see you don't know me. But I know you. I've seen you nearly every Friday on the bus into town."

Was it politeness or a genuine glimmer of recognition in her eyes now, as she said, "I thought there was something familiar about your face."

It was enough for me for the moment. We moved by common consent out of the store and on to the teeming pavement. There I looked at her. "Which way?" I asked, and she smiled at my persistence.

"I've finished my shopping, I think; so if you wouldn't mind walking to the bus station . . ."

"I was going that way myself," I lied.

"Well, I'm not taking you out of your way, then." She gave me another of those smiles which seemed to turn my heart right over. "But it really is very good of you."

We walked along in comparative silence. I had the reputation among my friends of being something of a wit, but now I was almost tongue-tied and could think of only the most common-place remarks. And soon we'd be in the bus station and it would be all over.

"This is really lucky for me," I said all at once.

She glanced up at me. "Oh?"

"Yes. I've seen you quite a lot these past few months and I've wanted a chance to speak to you."

"Oh?" she said again.

"I couldn't simply walk up to you and start talking, could I? You know with some girls you could, but not you."

We had stopped on a corner now and she was gazing at me with hazel eyes full of a bland sophistication that made me feel fourteen years old. I felt that I was on the verge of a blush; but I was determined to see it through. I might never have another chance. She glanced at her watch and I blurted out, "Well, you see, the idea was that I should ask you to come out with me some evening . . ."

"But I don't know you," she said.

"That's the trouble," I said, feeling smaller and more foolish with every second she went on gazing up at me. "But how else can we get to know each other?"

"No," she agreed, freeing me from her direct gaze at last. "I see your point. But I'm afraid I couldn't. My boy friend wouldn't like it, you see."

"Oh! Your boy friend." What a fool I was! Seeing her always alone, I'd never considered the most obvious point—that someone else might have a prior claim on her.

She went on, blasting all my hopes and driving me deeper into confusion. "He doesn't live round here and we only see each other at weekends; but he wouldn't like me to go out with anybody else during the week."

"No," I babbled. "No, of course not." All I could think of now was what a fool I must look to her. I gave her back her shopping bag. "I'm sorry I said anything."

Going home, I thought that these things worked only in books or on the films; in real life you were just made to look silly. And it was pride that was really uppermost in my mind now. So long as she didn't turn the incident into a joke to tell her friends, it mightn't be too bad. I'd told nobody about her, not even Larry and Peter, and I was even more disinclined to take them into my confidence now.

But when the confusion had left me I realised that the setback hadn't changed my feelings towards her. I abandoned my evening walks but still watched for her on Friday afternoons. And now the ice was broken; we could greet each other as acquaintances, and she did at least acknowledge my existence by allowing me to ride with her into town and talking with me while we waited for our connections. Sometimes Peter, who lived out in my direction, would be with us, but more often we were alone. All the rest of the winter, my mind was full of her, and the idea that, if only I were patient, she might one day turn to me became the great impossible dream of my life. My feeling for her deepened steadily, strengthened by the very absence of encouragement, until it seemed to me that all the wonder and delight of

Woman was contained in her sweet and gentle self. And, sustained by my dream, I went on wooing her passively by my presence on those short homeward journeys on the one afternoon in the week.

On an afternoon in March, with the days lengthening into spring, we stood together chatting idly in the bus station. I was talking about a film I'd seen at the weekend. She mentioned then that she'd spent the weekend indoors and, wondering at this, I mentioned my unknown rival for the first time.

"He's neglected you for once, then?" I said, trying to keep my voice light.

"For always," she said. "It's over: it has been for weeks."

My heart gave a tremendous leap of joy. Over! Then there was nothing to stop her going out with me.

"Are you still thinking about that?"

"Of course." Oh, God, wasn't it all I'd been able to think about since I first saw her!

"But why?" she said, and it seemed to me that there was a great weariness in her voice. "We're friends, aren't we? Isn't it enough for you?"

"It can never be enough."

"But why?" she said again.

"Because . . . because I like you very much." No, it wasn't good enough. I had to say it, even here in broad daylight among swarms of people. I must say it. "Because I love you."

She shook her head. "It's no use. I'm sorry, Clive, but it could only lead to disappointment. People never live up to expectation, you know."

It needed only one word from her to make my world a place of life and joy and laughter; and I was shocked by the disillusionment in her voice. "Why . . that's defeatism! Look, perhaps you are a bit cut up just now, but you can't look at life in general like that."

"It's the way things are," she said with quiet finality. "That's the way it goes."

I could only think she had loved him very much, and envy him for that. Whatever had happened between them had hurt her very badly. Frantically I searched for something else to say, then gave up as I realised that it was no good. I knew with miserable certainty that it never had been.

I saw her several more times before summer came, bringing with it the end of my deferment and a summons to serve a postponed period of National Service.

I took a job in the Midlands when I came out of the army and it was only on occasional weekends that I went home to see my family. As time went by I lost touch with Larry and Peter and I saw neither of them until one weekend, a few years after leaving the army, when I ran into Larry while on a visit home. It was lunch-time and we went into a nearby pub to talk over a glass of beer. Larry had been working away too—in London—but had now married and returned to settle in his home town.

"And Peter," I said when we'd gossiped for a while. "What's he doing nowadays?"

"He's in the Merchant Navy," Larry told me. "Fourth Engineer—or is it Fifth? I forget."

"I seem to remember hearing he'd got married . . ."

"Lord, yes!" Larry's ugly mobile face screwed itself into a grimace of disgust. "Bought himself a real packet there. He signed on to get away from it all."

"As bad as that, eh? Who did he marry? A local girl?"

"Called Joyce Henryson. Used to work up the road from us. That's how he met her. On the bus."

"Joyce Henryson?" Could it be? I tried to analyse the feeling the name evoked in me. How long since she was in my thoughts? I could almost feel myself blushing at my past folly. But trouble?

"That's right," Larry said. "You knew her. You used to ride down into town with her, didn't you? I remember thinking at one time that you had a fancy for her yourself."

"And you say old Peter went to sea to get away from her?"

"He certainly did, mate. What a so-and-so she turned out to be! He always knew she liked a good time, mind. He was mad about her, but after they were married he just couldn't keep up with her. He wrote to me and I got him a job with my firm in London. The money was better but she wouldn't move and he was no better off trying to keep both ends going and seeing her only once every few weeks."

I drank from my glass, listening to him.

"A sorry tale, Clive. He found out eventually that she was carrying on with a bloke she'd known years back. A married man. Seemed she'd had an unhappy affair with him then, and now he'd left his wife and there was nothing standing between them but poor old Peter. She seemed to blame him for that. I tell you, she got him so he didn't know what he was doing. And you know what a steady lad he always was."

I nodded. "He'll be putting in for a divorce, then?"

"The sooner he gets rid, the better."

We drank in silence for some minutes.

"No signs of you getting hitched, then, Clive?"

I shook my head. "No . . . haven't found the right one, I suppose."

"Yes, it's all right if you get the right one; and hell if you pick a wrong 'un."

"You know," I said in a moment, "she never struck me as being that sort."

"Nor Peter, evidently. Still, you never did know her well, did you?"

I looked at the amber dregs of my beer. Of course I was thinking—would it have been different with me? Could I have held her or would I have got the same rotten deal as Peter? And how rotten did the deal seem to her? They were things I'd never, never know.

"No," I said at length. "No, she was just a casual acquaintance."

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Butch the Burglar

" The branch reaches the winder, all right, but another little problem has come up."

GREEN TURTLE

by TOM MACDONALD

THE green turtle, sprawled helplessly on its belly, lay like a hump among the dead-eyed fish on the white slab of the fishmonger's shop of Ah Moon in Tingpoo. The broad paddle-shaped flippers were meshed together with a cord. The big claws now and again scrabbled the white slab. It had tried so hard to move but it was almost resigned now to the knowledge that it was fastened as if to a rock.

Its head shot out from its long neck whenever Ah Moon came near. The jaws, given half a chance, were ready to snap. Ah Moon of the wrinkled, yellow-rock face, smoothed his paunch with the palms of his hands and gave a fat laugh. The turtle popped its head in.

The fishmonger tapped the bony shell with his knuckles, playing a tattoo on it as if it were a drum. Snap-snap. But Ah Moon's fat fingers were out of reach.

"Vicious, eh?" he said. "But soon you'll be soup."

The turtle's horny head sagged.

"You look," said Ah Moon, "as wise and as old as an ancient priest."

It was a beautiful turtle, the most massive he had ever seen. The patterns on the shell looked as if they had been carved.

Two coolies had trotted with it from the boat of Ah Sing, the fisherman. It was so heavy that they had slung it between them

on a bamboo pole. There had been quite a lot of haggling.

"Look at it," Ah Sing had said. "Here is a treasure." He looked at the coil of eels, at the curl of dead frogs and at the craggy head of a grunter frozen in death. "Rubbish," he said. "But this, my friend, this has flesh—for the soup of the gods."

"I have seen bigger and fleshier turtles, Ah Sing."

When Ah Sing mentioned fifty Hong Kong dollars as the price, Ah Moon laughed in derision. Six times the coolies were waved to take the turtle away and each time they were called to a halt by Ah Sing.

"In West Point, Hong Kong," he said, "it would fetch a hundred dollars at Fah Loon's restaurant."

"Take it there," said Ah Moon. "It would die on the way."

He paid twenty dollars for it and bemoaned his foolishness until the fisherman departed. He had decided that if it didn't fetch three times as much he would turn it into soup for himself.

Many women came to haggle and to buy—women padding in soft black slippers, and women clip-clopping in yellow sandals. Most of them looked hungrily at the turtle but it was like longing for the moon. They were the wives of small tradesmen and several of them remarked on the size of the turtle.

"Bigger than any that ever came out of the China Sea," Ah Moon told them.

Some of the women could only afford to buy a frog. They went off dangling the dead frog on a strand snipped from a bamboo leaf.

And bamboo-slim Lo Yew came down the street. She wore blue satin trousers, a yellow coat and silver sandals. She had a white star of a gardenia in the black gloss of her hair, just above her left ear. She looked like a Ming goblet and just as fragile. She still had the bloom of a girl and she looked untouched even though she came from the Street of the Beautiful Dolls. Light jade earrings dangled from her small ears. The old amah, keeper of the house, had been pleased with her and had told her she could idle away the day. And walking down the street Yew's heart was as light as her feet.

As she came opposite Ah Moon's shop the green turtle was having a cry. Its eyes were filled with tears. The tears rolled down on the white slab.

"Oh," she said.

Ah Moon saw her, knew whence she came and felt that one day he would get round to her.

"So you are admiring my turtle," he said. "Now isn't it the

most magnificent turtle you have ever seen? Look how the sea moss shades the shell."

"But it weeps," she said.

He laughed. "And wouldn't you, little doll, if you knew you would be turned into soup before the day is done?"

"You're cruel," she said.

It was then that Ah Tong stopped in front of the shop. He was barefooted. On the threshold of manhood, he had the litheness of the wild spotted cat of the hills in his brown frame. In the market crowd he had just relieved Ah Sing, the fisherman, of his wallet in which cuddled the twenty dollars that Ah Moon had paid for the turtle.

Lo Yew turned to him. "Look at the poor turtle, see how it weeps." Her inky black eyes were clouded.

"Don't come too near, for you are the light-fingered one," said Ah Moon to Ah Tong. "I must even keep an eye on my big turtle with you around."

Ah Tong assumed an air of injured innocence.

"You wrong me," he said humbly.

"I don't," said the fishmonger. "Someday you'll be caught and you'll be breaking stones in the jail quarry in Hong Kong."

"Leave him alone," snapped Yew, "you're a cruel man."

"You're a cruel man," echoed Tong.

"Get along, you trash," said the fishmonger.

A limousine came to a stop, its tyres nuzzling the kerb. A little old woman with the face of a crab looked out. The chauffeur leapt out and opened the door. And Ho Chai, the richest woman in Tingpoo, the keeper of the gambling dens, tottered out. She had paid long ago with a pot of tears for the hobbling of her feet, for she was so old that she had been a child when the last but one of the Manchus sat on the dragon throne in faraway Peking. Her small head seemed to be pulled into her shoulders by heavy gold earrings. Her pigtail was a grey rag of a rat tail.

As she tottered into the shop her piggy eyes speared the turtle.

Ah Moon bowed. "I should have known, Madam Ho Chai, that the most gorgeous, luscious, tastiest turtle in all the China Sea had been destined for your soup pots."

The turtle snapped its jaws. The turtle wept.

"How much, master of all the rogues of Tingpoo, do you want to squeeze me for it? I've seen bigger and better."

"You joke, Madam Ho Chai. But for you, and only for you mind, I'll make a gift of it for eighty dollars."

"Twenty," she snapped.

Ah Moon's eyes rolled upwards. "But Madam Ho Chai, look

at it, the grandfather of all turtles, a hundred bowls of soup."

The turtle dropped its head. The tears rolled.

"It weeps," said Yew.

"How it weeps," said Tong.

Madam Ho Chai cackled. "It's the salt water in its eyes."

"Eighty dollars," said Ah Moon.

"A dollar a tear, you pickpocket of the purses of the poor," said Madam Ho Chai.

Tong laughed.

"It's cruel," said Yew. "The poor turtle weeps for its life."

"It's terrible to see a turtle cry," someone said, for a crowd had now collected.

"Look," said Yew, "it weeps like a child."

"Like a child in the land of famine," said Tong.

Feng Hang, the tailor, was there, his spectacles perched on the tip of his nose and a row of pins glistening on the breast of his tunic. And Chow Lat Wong, the merchant, in his skull cap, with his hands nestling in the wide sleeves of his coat. And Ah Yet, the butcher, with flecks of blood on his hands, the butcher who hated Ah Moon. And Ah Fong, the tinker, with a cluster of pots on his back and a brace of old umbrellas under his arm. Other merchants. Other hawkers. Children. Coolies.

"The turtle weeps," said Yew, and now she was weeping.

"It's the way with turtles," shouted Ah Moon. "They are not real tears. Sixty dollars, Madam Ho Chai. I'm giving it away. See how the sea has seeped into it, green as jade, Madam Ho Chai. Sixty dollars."

"Barefaced robbery," said the butcher.

"It's cruel," said Yew. "It belongs to the green sea."

"It's barbaric," said the butcher. "Selling live creatures like this."

"May all the pots of the buyer of this poor turtle leak," said the tinker.

"May they leak all the soup away," murmured the people.

"The turtles I have sold," cried Ah Moon. "And no one has ever called me a cruel man."

"It has taken a beautiful lotus of a girl to show what a murderer you are," said the butcher.

The turtle gushed tears.

"How it weeps," said Madam Ho Chai.

"That's what I've been saying all along," said Yew.

Ah Moon waved his arms. "I'm not a monster," he yelled. "I tell you it's the way of turtles to weep. It's their nature."

"Let's buy it back from the fishmonger," said Yew.

"And take it back to the sea," said Tong.

"How much?" asked Chow Lat Wong.

"Sixty dollars," said Ah Moon.

Ah Sing, the fisherman, pushed through the crowd. "You paid me twenty dollars."

"Sixty is three times that," said the butcher. "He would rob a blind beggar's money box on the steps of the temple, he would."

"Robber!" the people cried.

"Make him pay for his cruelty to turtles," said the butcher. "Ten dollars."

"Ten dollars!" the people roared.

The turtle wept. Sweat runnelled Ah Moon's face.

"Take it," he said. "Ten dollars."

Lo Yew pulled at a little silver chain and a purse peeped above the curve of her breasts. She took out a dollar. Madam Ho Chai borrowed some money from her chauffeur. Chow Lat Wong dipped into his pocket. The butcher, the tailor, the tinker paid. Ah Sing patted his pockets and cried, "I've been robbed," but no one heeded him. He found some loose change in his trouser's pocket, and paid. Coolie women and children paid in cents.

And Ah Moon was paid.

"Now we'll take the poor turtle to the river," said Tong.

Ah Sing tied the turtle's jaws with string and it was carried to Madam Ho Chai's limousine. People packed in like pilchards in a can, and some were on the roof with a flock of children. Ah Moon was in the car with Madam Ho Chai sitting on his knees, for the saviours of the turtle had insisted that he should have the joy of seeing the purpose of his sacrifice and the shriving of his soul.

They came to the brown river a mile from the sea. The fisherman cut the string from the jaws. The turtle did not snap. The fishmonger freed its limbs.

"Look, the turtle has stopped weeping," said Yew.

"It knows," said Tong.

They followed it as it slithered down the bank. It splashed into the water. It swam around and headed down river with bold strokes. The people cheered and they saw the head of another turtle. The turtles met and the one swimming up river turned and swam alongside the one going down to the sea.

"Its mate came to fetch it," cried Yew.

The people cheered again, and both heads bobbed around a bend and they were out of sight.

Lo Yew saw Tong slip a wallet into the pocket of Ah Sing, the fisherman. A moment later, as if he wanted to wipe sweat from his face or tears from his eyes, for he was feeling for a handkerchief, the fisherman felt the wallet, pulled it out,opened it, riffled the dollar notes and cried, "A miracle! I lost my wallet and here it is back!"

Yew and Tong stood apart while Ah Moon whispered to Madam Ho Chai. The old woman looked down her nose. And people brushed their garments as if they were brushing away some contamination.

When Madam Ho Chai's limousine drove away, Ah Fong, the tinker, was also left and he walked across to them as they stood holding hands.

"It was wonderful. If I had a new umbrella I'd give it to you," he said to Yew.

"I know you would," she said.

"Good-bye, and the blessings of Fen Shen go with you, my children."

"And may Tsai Shen hold your hand," said Tong.

The tinker went off, laughing.

"They left us and the poor tinker here because they knew what I am," she said.

"And what I am," he said. "I am Ah Tong the thief."

"I know," said Yew. "To be such a clever thief you must be a clever man."

"Oh."

"I saw you return the wallet of the fisherman."

"No one else did."

"No one else, Tong. I am Lo Yew. I was a child when the Reds came to our town. My father was a rich merchant but he and my mother were killed. I was on a long march of misery and I came to Tingpoo where I was sold to an amah in the Street of Dolls."

"I know," said Tong. "As a child I also fled from the Reds, who made me an orphan. I have seen you sitting in the window in the Street of Dolls, braiding your hair."

She didn't tell him she had seen him watching.

"And you don't despise me, Tong?" she asked.

"I? I have often lingered in the shadows to steal a look at you. But Lo Yew, as I watched the turtle swimming away to freedom I saw what the other people didn't see."

"I, too."

"What?"

"Left and right as it swam it nodded its head and every nod was a thank you."

"I read that, too, in the swimming of the turtle."

Their handclasp tightened.

"Let's go to the temple of the bluebird," she said, looking towards a hill.

They climbed to a grove of bamboos which shielded the temple. They plucked some flaming hibiscus blossoms.

The grove was full of a soft blue light. Petals were floating on a blue moat. They dropped the hibiscus petals into the moat. She took the gardenia from her hair and dropped it into the water. The red tips of joss sticks glowed in the porcelain gods.

In a corner sat Fen Shen, the god of happiness, and in his china face was the peace of moonlight on water. Flanking Fen Shen were Tsai Shen, the god of wealth, and Shon Hsing, god of long life.

They lit blue candles to the three gods. A priest in a blue robe set alight a slip of silken paper, and as the smoke feathered away it took a prayer to the everlasting abode of the three gods. They dropped coins into the priest's bowl.

The priest asked, "Are you betrothed?"

"We are," said Yew, and she put a finger on the mouth of Tong lest he should speak.

And the priest said, "Marriages are made in the moon. In the moon sits an old man and he ties the bridal couple with a blue cord. May you be as happy as the green turtles of the sea."

They came out into the glare of the sun and at one of the gates they saw the white statue of Kuan Yin, the goddess of mercy.

Kneeling, Lo Yew said, "Kuan Yin, I am not going back to Tingpoo. Tong and I are going to the great city of Hong Kong."

She bowed to the goddess and rose. She took Tong's hand. "This morning I knew I was going to Hong Kong. It's twenty miles away. One of my friends is a singing girl in a rich restaurant. Now all will be well. It was in the temple that I got the last link in the chain. The bronze tortoise—the tortoise which is a brother of the turtle—killing the bronze snake."

"I saw it," he said. "The tortoise is the sign of long life."

"We have the three gods watching over us, and Kuan Yin who never forgets."

"And the old man in the moon has tied our hands with the blue cord," he said.

"And the green turtle will live long and will always remember us, Tong."

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At first they came as small shadows

THE GREASER'S STORY

BY O. E. MIDDLETON

THE *Kaitiki* was one of those reliable old ships which used to carry cargoes across the Tasman and around the coasts of Australasia. When I joined her, she had a mixed crew of Australians, Englishmen and New Zealanders, and her crew's quarters and food were poor by comparison with the newer ships. But there was a girl in Sydney I wanted to see again rather badly, so, although it wasn't my usual job, I signed on as a greaser, hung up my shore-going gear in the locker, and looked around to see who my cabin mate would be.

He turned out to be a youngish fellow called Johnson from Liverpool. He was slight and dark with a small scar on the fleshy part of his left cheek. He had a quick, jerky way of speaking, and a habit of darting his eyes about which you noticed the first time you met him. But you strike all sorts at sea.

As long as he doesn't go throwing boozy parties in the cabin when I'm trying to get some shut-eye, I thought.

I found myself on the 4-8 watch, Johnson got the 12-4, and a West Australian called Slim Young took the 8-12. One way and another, several of us found we had bumped into each other at sea, or in port, on other ships. No one seemed to know Scouse Johnson, though. In spite of the discharges he had, both coastal and deep-sea, no one seemed to have set eyes on him before.

We left Wellington on a fresh June morning with general cargo for Sydney and Newcastle. There were the usual Westerlies in the Strait, but the wind dropped to a breeze as we cleared the coast and we seemed set for a steady, routine trip.

Although she had none of the lines of the newer ships, the old *Kaitiki* was a good sailer. She had been under the same master for years and was reputed to have made millions for her owners in the years she had plied the Tasman.

When I went down to relieve Johnson for my first watch, we chatted briefly at the foot of the ladder.

"How's she going, Scouse?"

"Not too bad. She'd be like an oven in the tropics though."

It was true that the *Kaitiki* brought forth more noise and heat from her old belly than many a ship twice her size. She had been built in the first place as a coal-burner, but her engines had been converted to oil at about the time of the first World War.

"No wonder so many of the firemen ashore won't have her on," I said to myself as I went about with my can and lump of cotton waste.

As soon as my stint was over and I had swapped a few words with Slim, I was glad to get up into the fresh air. When I had showered and hung my gear to dry on a steam-pipe, I wandered into the mess for a cup of coffee and found a crowd playing cards.

It looked as though Johnson hadn't turned in on coming off duty. He was sitting behind a fistful of cards in a school with the Peggy, the assistant cook, and two firemen, and they weren't playing for fun. I leaned against the bulkhead taking occasional swigs from my mug and trying to follow the run of the game. There is no better way of passing time at sea, as long as stakes are not too high, and I kept glancing from face to face over the rim of my mug, trying to guess which way the luck was going,

There was a faint rustling from the top of the food locker where the Peggy had left a parcel of fresh bread. As I turned to see what it was, I saw that Scouse had already looked up with that quick movement of his head, and was staring at something. The next moment he dropped his hand and made a dive for the broom, but by then the rat had run along a pipe and out of sight. Scouse put back the broom and picked up his cards again, but his hands were unsteady and I fancied his lower lip trembled.

"Only a bloody rat." It was the Aussie fireman. "Nothing to do your block over." He raised the bet.

No one else said anything, although the Peggy and the assistant cook kept their eyes on Johnson.

"The grog's got him," their looks seemed to say, and I suppose most of us thought the same. Although he laid down three Jacks to the Aussie's thirty days, Johnson still looked white.

I finished my drink, rinsed my mug, and went down the passage with the idea of turning in. I was in my bunk when Scouse came in and switched on the light again. He glanced quickly around the cabin and sat down on the bunk below.

"How did the game go?"

"Not too bad, you know. I'd still have been there only . . ."

"The others still there?"

"Yes. They're still at it." He got up nervously, took something out of the locker, and stood looking at it under the light.

"Hope you don't mind, mate. I brought a bit of poison for the rats. I'm funny that way. Always like to leave a few baits about to take care of the stray ones."

"That's all right by me."

"Good. I'll leave a few baits in the locker, and up under the deckhead in the mess." He sounded relieved and quickly began tearing open the paper packet.

"You don't like rats, do you?"

He turned his small face towards me. It was almost level with mine and the mark on his cheek seemed to stand out.

"I hate them!" He stared at me with his white face, and in the light from the bare bulb his lips were trembling.

"We've all got our likes and dislikes." I tried to soothe him. "I'm not too keen on the brutes myself, but you get used to them."

"Get used to them . . .! Not me mate! Do you see this?" He reached under his bunk and pulled out a heavy air pistol, holding it carefully, muzzle down. "Always carry it when I'm on watch . . ."

"For the rats?"

"You betcha. For the bloody landlords!"

"You should get plenty of sport this trip, then."

"How do you mean?" He slipped the pistol away into his pocket and stared at me again.

"Well, the old *Kaitiki* seems to have her quota. I saw a couple as I came up the fiddley tonight. Then there was that one in the mess just now . . . For every rat you see, there's fifty more in hiding, they say."

"That's no lie. These blasted old tubs are always the worst, as well."

He had started to pace up and down the cabin and the effort of watching him was growing too much for me.

"Don't let it get you down, Scouse. I'm for some shut-eye now. Why don't you doss down yourself for an hour? Do you good."

Without another word, he put out the light and stretched out on his bunk. It's funny how you get used to the sounds made by a ship's insides as she goes about her business. You never seem to sleep as soundly ashore as you do in your own bunk at sea, with the friendly creakings and groanings, the familiar motion of a ship under way. Just as I was dropping off that night, I

couldn't be sure, but I seemed to hear above the straining of steel and timber, the beat of our engines, the slap-slap of an unlatched door, the squeak of a cork coming out of a bottle.

"Come on, Jack! Wakey wakey!"

Scouse stood beside the bunk, his face shiny with sweat and grease.

"You got twenty minutes."

"Right. Everything O.K.?"

He looked over-tired, far more weary than he had any right to be on our second morning out.

"The job's all right, but the rats have been keeping me busy. I got three."

"With the pistol?"

"Bet your life!"

"You want to watch out you don't go hitting any of the boys. One of those slugs has only to bounce off the plates and catch one of the engineers."

"I'm no new chum with one of these, mate." He patted the pocket of his jacket and went away to finish his watch.

I got my gear off the steam-pipe and climbed into it, yawning. The two firemen on the four to eight were already in the mess, breathing into their mugs.

"Everything under control?" It was Robbie, the little fellow from Glasgow.

"Not too bad, Robbie. Bit reluctant, as usual. But it'll pass off once we hit Sydney."

"You can say that again, mate!"

A thought struck me.

"You or your mate seen any rats so far this trip?"

"Yes. There was one of the brutes in the cabin last night, wasn't there, Bill?"

"Yeah. I heaved my boot at him. Big, black bugger. He ducked behind a stanchion and that's the last I saw of him."

It was time to go below and, still yawning, I followed them down.

An hour later, I managed to slip along to the stokehold for a yarn with Robbie and Bill. Wilson was on duty in the engine-room. He nodded to me as I came down the ladder.

"How's your Scouse cobber making out?"

His interest surprised me but I tried not to show it.

"He's all right. Bit nervy, but he's settling down. Someone reckoned he was torpedoed twice during the war. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. McDermott was wondering about him."

McDermott was the engineer on Johnson's watch and it came to me that he must have seen Scouse at work with his pistol.

"I'll have to warn him to be more careful," I told myself.

Bill and Robbie were having a breather under the vent.

"Funny you should be asking about rats," Robbie greeted me. "Look there!" In the shadows above the bilges three of the brutes were frisking. I picked up a piece of dunnage and threw it. There was a scatter, but in a few moments, first their heads, then their lean bodies came up again over the grating.

"Can you beat that!" Robbie was staring at them, flabbergasted. "A man wants a pea-rifle down here."

He picked up a rake and sent it clattering over the plates, but once they hid below the grating there was no way of getting at them.

We began to talk about Sydney. About the pubs and the girls we knew. We forgot the old *Kaitiki* and her rats and said what we'd do in King's Cross on our nights ashore. Robbie and Bill kept a close watch on their fires so that when Wilson looked in, all was well. The talk came around to ships we had known and at last to the *Kaitiki* and her rats, but there was work waiting for me upstairs and I had to go. As I went about my job, I kept my eyes open for rats and counted eight in various places before my watch was done. When Slim came down to relieve me I suggested he keep his own tally and pass it on to Scouse when they changed over.

When I opened the cabin door I was glad to see Scouse in his bunk with his face turned to the bulkhead. Do him the world of good. It would be no joke if he cracked up now and Slim and I had to split his watch.

After breakfast, I did some washing and sat on the after deck while it dried. The Peggy came in to hang out some dish-rags. He was a skinny, long-faced fellow from Manchester.

"You having any trouble with the rats, Peggy?"

He looked at me knowingly. "Cook found four dead in the galley this morning. Reckoned they had been poisoned. Seems the bloody old ship's alive with them. There must be hundreds. Nothing you can do about it, though. You'd never get rid of all of them in a year at sea. All we can do is hope some of them go ashore in Sydney."

I told him I had seen big droppings on top of the food locker.

"Don't worry, all the stores are locked away inside now. I don't like my grub gnawed by those brutes any more than you do."

I was glad to hear it and to know the cook was awake to the rats. A man rests easier when he knows his food is clean.

There was not another ship in sight in the whole Tasman. As far as you could see every way there was only the grey-green sea ruffled by the Westerly, and astern of us, a couple of boatswain birds swinging and soaring. I found myself thinking about Johnson, wondering whether his sleep had done him any good. Or was he, at that very moment, taking a swig of something to steady himself for his next stint?

I looked up and there he was leaning against the rail only a few feet away.

"How's it now, Scouse?"

"Not so dusty. Everything all right below?"

I glanced around to see no one was near. The Peggy had gone.

"All except the rats. We were right. The old ship's lousy with them!"

I told him of my talk with Slim and about the idea of keeping tallies. He looked at me in a pleased way, the beginnings of a smile on his face.

"Now you got the right idea, Jack. There's only one way to handle these landlords, and that's to organise. We learnt that when we were nippers. Now if we all had one of these popguns (patting his pocket) and one or two packets of poison bait, we would soon show them who was boss."

"Give us a look at that pistol of yours, will you?"

He handed it over. It had a nice, solid feel in your hand.

"Can you get this make in Sydney?"

"I think so."

"Be kind of handy against the rats. And a man could always have a bit of target practice on deck when he felt like it."

He screwed up his eyes and gave me a confiding nudge. "You got the right idea, Jack. The rat is man's worst enemy. We should never let him get the upper hand, or it's the end of us."

"Here we go again," I said to myself. "He's got a kink about them and a man is a fool to egg him on."

Just then there was a shout from down near the galley, and a clang like the sound of a dixie hitting the deck. As Scouse and I turned our heads, a rat streaked around the corner of the deck-house. The instant he saw us he stopped, darting his head from side to side to find a way of escape. It was the first time I had seen one like that, face to face, in broad daylight. I was too surprised, too taken up with the sight of his sharp head, the quick movements of his body, to do anything.

There was a short snap like one of those target guns at a fun-fair and Mr. Rat was kicking in the scuppers.

"Good shot, Scouse!"

He didn't seem to hear me, but carefully reloaded and stood looking down at the rat. At that moment, the cook came round the corner with a poker in his hand.

"Well, scupper me!"

We lifted the rat on the poker and dropped him over the stern. The birds came wheeling in, one behind the other, but even they seemed to lose interest when they saw what had made the splash.

The cook was handling the pistol, examining it with interest.

"I could do with one of those in the galley. There's more rats in this ruddy old tub than I've seen in all my years at sea."

"There's another customer, Scouse," I said, when the cook had gone.

He nodded vaguely, but went on staring out over the stern, his elbows on the rail. The birds had resumed their monotonous soaring. The Tasman was the same, monotonous grey-green, flecked with white. The *Kaitiki*, on her second day out from Wellington bound for Sydney, kept her even course.

I was in the same place on the after deck two days later, watching my dhobi flapping in the Westerly and day-dreaming about my girl in Sydney, when Johnson showed up again. Now that the whole ship knew about the rats, he seemed easier in his mind and was getting his five or six hours sleep every morning, although he still spent his evenings playing cards in the mess.

"Don't tell me you're hoping to knock over another one up here?"

He spat over the rail and looked away into our wake. The birds had gone and now there was only sea and sky.

"No. I came along here to forget about them for a while. Looking forward to a pint of that Aussie grog, though." He ran his tongue over his lips.

"I reckon we all are. They say we'll be in tomorrow night, all being well."

He grew silent, staring down at the sea. In half an hour he would have to go below to eat his chow and begin another watch. Without shifting my position, I studied him carefully through half-closed eyes. He was still in his twenties, yet there was a pinched look to his face, a weediness in his frame, that I had often noticed in his fellow countrymen from the big cities. The kind of look a kid gets when he never eats enough of the right food and which seems to stay with him all his life.

Funny the way a man drags his childhood with him, one way or another, wherever he goes, I reflected. If it's not in the cut of

him, the way he carries himself, it's in the way he talks.

It wasn't so bad for a seaman. You get all sorts at sea and, thank goodness, a man's background means nothing. It's how he does his job, how he stands up to the life that matters. And when he's been at the game a few years, and knocked around all over the place, he picks up all kinds of strange accents, little tricks of speech, and it's hard to say where he's from.

Johnson seemed to get tired of standing at the rail, staring at nothing. He turned and sat on the deck beside me, his back against the bulkhead.

"Wonder how many Slim got this time?"

"Lucky if he gets any the way he blazes off. He's got no eye."

Scouse had taken to sharing his pistol with Slim and me so there was an armed patrol down below twenty-four hours a day, you might say. We all agreed that whoever killed the most rats by the time we reached Sydney would be shouted a case of beer by the other two.

"We'll be a floating armoury if all those others buy pistols in Sydney, the way they said."

Johnson sniffed, and spat. "It's not the answer, you know. It's only a way of self-protection, as you might say. To clean them out of this ship you would need to get at their hiding-places. There's only one way to do that . . ."

"Fumigation?"

"That's it, mate."

"Still, it gives us something to think about, picking the odd one off. Think they'll leave us in Sydney the way the Peggy reckons they will?"

He snorted. "What does *he* know about it? He doesn't even know a Norwegian rat from a ship's rat!"

There was so much scorn in his voice that I turned to look at him. He stared back at me.

"I tell you our rats are not Sydney rats . . ." He stopped short as though he wanted to say more but didn't know how. It came to me all at once that he had purposely sought me out to unburden himself of something disagreeable.

"You wouldn't have a rat-catcher in your family by any chance, would you, Scouse?"

It was all he needed. "Look here . . .! Do you see this!" He leaned towards me, his fingers touching the part of his cheek where the skin was puckered into a small white scar. "Do you know what this is?"

"Somewhere you hurt yourself when you were a kid?"

"Rat-bite!" He almost yelled it in my face. "Happened when I was asleep in my cot." He gave a funny laugh and looked quickly round to make sure we were alone. "Seems funny to you, I suppose. But it was something we grew up with where I came from."

There was nothing I could say, so I kept quiet and waited for him to go on.

"It was nothing unusual in our neighbourhood. One kid lost half an ear. When you lived in a tenement area like ours you heard of plenty of cases like mine. Sometimes it got a few lines in the papers and I suppose the old dears who lived on the good side of town said, 'Tch! Tch! But what can you expect when they live in such awful conditions?'"

"What part did you come from, Scouse?"

He told me.

"I know that area. Near the docks. Got it bad during the bombing. Very little of it left, is there?"

For the first time since I had met him, he really smiled.

"That's right! Best thing that ever happened to it. They say the war did no one any good, but wiping out all those tenements was a wonderful thing. The only trouble was there were people in a lot of them at the time . . ."

"Some of your own?"

"My mother and kid sister. There were lots worse off, though. In some of them there were whole families wiped out."

"I suppose it's all rebuilt now?"

"Most of it. Big blocks of flats with playing areas in between. Best thing that ever happened to that part of town. I went for a walk through there a couple of years ago when we were in the Mersey. Did me good just to hear the din the kids were making. But when you've had a thing like that happen to you, it sort of sticks in the back of your mind. When you've woken up and felt something sitting beside your face in the stinking dark . . . felt its whiskers brush your cheek, and the teeth . . ." His voice started climbing up and his eyes stared like a scared kid.

"Take it easy, Scouse. Forget it." I put on a flat, casual voice, but I couldn't help thinking, Poor bastard! How a man takes his easy, New Zealand background for granted.

He quietened down and went on in his usual voice. "All my schoolmates went to sea as soon as they were old enough—and some before—except the ones who got it in the air raids, of course. I had my first trip early in the war and I've been going to sea ever since. But I'd have thought twice about signing on here if I'd known . . ."

"If you'd known we had so many landlords?"

"You said it!"

"Where did you ever dream up that name for them?" I wanted to ease him out of his troubles. Keep him talking till he was clear of them.

He glared at me, and this time there was no fear in his eyes; only the mean look of someone who has suffered and not forgotten. "Did you ever see a scabby landlord creep down a street between rows of tenements on rent day, and half the people not knowing where the next meal was coming from—never mind his lousy miserable rent . . .?"

"Can't say I have."

"With his rent bag in his hand and a tight grip on his stick for fear someone might waylay him?"

"That sounds more like a debt-collector to me. Surely the landlord himself wouldn't have dared to show his face in a neighbourhood like yours?"

"Maybe you're right. But the rat who collected our rent was always the landlord to us. He battened on us like those others in the walls and cupboards and there was nothing we could do about it.

"One way and another, the rats had charge of our lives, just as they have charge of this ship," he went on. "As I said before, it's something we grew up with. For us, a rat was always a landlord, and vice versa. Something I didn't know then and found out only afterwards was that some of the worst places were owned by the Church of England."

I felt I knew Johnson better after this. The next time the Peggy made some sly remark about my rat-happy cabin mate, I told him it was a pity he wasn't more down on them himself. A couple of times, some of us found rat-dirts on the mess-room table, and the Peggy came in for some rough talk for his slovenly ways. The rats were getting on all our nerves, and it galled me to see him with his fag stuck on his lip and his greasy cloth on his shoulder, poking fun at Johnson for something he couldn't help.

And in spite of all the traps, and old sailors' tricks we got up to to get rid of the rats, Johnson killed more with his pistol and packets of poison than anyone else. Although many more must have crawled away to their hiding-places to die, we picked up fifteen poisoned ones in the alleys and in odd places before we got to Sydney. And when it came to knocking them over down below, Slim and I together shot barely half the number the Scouse did.

We had the beer sent down to the ship for him as soon as we

docked, and I carried it into the cabin myself, and dumped it on his bunk. Naturally, he wanted us all to have a drink with him before we went ashore, but I was keen to see my girl, so didn't wait for the others.

Next day, Scouse was unable to turn to, so Slim and I took care of what there was to do, which wasn't much. He was better again the day after, and went ashore a couple of times with us in the evenings before we sailed.

While they were unloading us, the Sydney wharfies found several dead rats among the cargo. There was talk of a stoppage because of the health risk, but it all blew over for some reason. The Peggy and some of the others reckoned the rats would leave us before we sailed from Sydney, but the Scouse only shook his head at me whenever the subject cropped up. "I keep telling you they're not Sydney rats . . ."

They were still with us when we cast off and went out under the bridge, but at the time, I wasn't caring greatly. After the all too short reunion with my girl, my thoughts began to dwell, not for the first time, on the idea of a shore job. Several of the crew, including the cook, had bought airguns of one sort or another, so it seemed that our landlords were in for a lively time.

But scarcely a rat showed his head on the run up the coast. We ran into Northerlies and it was dark by the time we tied up. Newcastle is a town which has never appealed to me much, and, after Sydney, I was looking forward to a few quiet nights anyway.

Johnson said he was going to look up some girl he had known when he was on the phosphate run a year or so before. He spruced himself up and put on his best gear and seemed very cheerful as he waited to go ashore.

"Take it easy. Mind how you go!" I threw after him as he went out of the cabin. Two minutes later, he burst in again. "Hey, Jack! Come and see this!"

I got off my bunk and followed him up to the after deck. Something flitted across the deck ahead of us as we walked to the rail, and Johnson aimed a kick at it but missed in the bad light.

The way the tide was, our deck was roughly level with the quay. As I stood beside Johnson and followed his pointing finger, I saw that our rats were going ashore. There seemed to be no one on gangway watch, and they were scurrying down in twos and threes and melting into the shadows of the wharf buildings.

"Can you beat that!" It was the first time I had seen anything like it. There must have been scores, hundreds of them.

Johnson made a sound beside me. It was half sob, half

exultant laugh. "Go, you stinking bastards! Back where you belong!"

"You were right, after all," I said. "They seem to know when they are home."

The second officer and one of the engineers came out of their quarters amidships. They stepped on to the gangway, then froze in their tracks. At the same moment, a group of seamen went past us along the deck, cracking jokes, and stopped at the head of the gangway. Johnson was beside himself. I thought he would have choked with laughter as we heard the second mate's curses and saw the men dancing and skipping down the gangway.

"Make way for your betters!" he hailed them through cupped hands. "All ashore that's going ashore . . .!"

"Should be someone on gangway duty," I said, half to myself. Johnson made an abrupt movement with his head.

"Let them go! What's the good of stopping them? Besides, a man at the top of the plank wouldn't hold them back . . ."

"Maybe you're right." In any case, it seemed a good way of getting rid of them. They had got on all our nerves, become our number one worry. There had even been talk of holding a union meeting to deal with them.

In a few more minutes, they all seemed to have gone. As Johnson and I walked to the gangway, there wasn't a rat to be seen on deck or along the quay.

He hesitated a moment before going down. "They're gone, Jack. The brutes have left us . . ."

"Off with you, Scouse. See you tomorrow." I was dog-tired and wasted no time getting back to my bunk.

There was no sign of Johnson all next day.

"Must have picked up with his doxy again all right," the Peggy gave out at midday.

The following day, there was still no sign of him. He was clearly adrift, and that meant trouble with the skipper and loss of pay when he got back—*if* he got back.

"Proper one-way-Charlie if you ask me," sneered the Peggy. "He just can't face the trip back with the rats, so he's jumped."

"You forget, we're shot of them," one of the down-below gang pointed out.

But I was beginning to think the Peggy was right. With his background, this trip has been too much for him, I thought. He's had a night on that cheap Aussie brandy, woken up with his nerves in pieces, and decided to let the old *Kaitiki* sail without him.

Of course we all guessed there was a woman in it somewhere. A man doesn't leave all his belongings and a fortnight's pay for *nothing at all, no matter what the Peggy might say.* That afternoon, a gang of us were repairing the condenser when Wilson asked if I knew anything about Johnson.

"He'll be back," I said. "All his gear's still in the cabin."

"He'd better be! Deserters get a rough time here, they tell me. Did he know when we were sailing?"

I said yes, and hoped for Johnson's sake he did know and would rejoin us in time because what Wilson said was true.

We finished loading a couple of days later and were due to sail at six in the evening. With not having gone ashore, and with the overtime we had worked on engine-room repairs, Newcastle had saved me money, and I felt sorry for Scouse when he came alongside in a taxi in the late afternoon. He had only enough left to pay the driver and looked very much the worse for wear, but he had the sense to see the engineer and report straight to the captain. He was sound asleep, still in his shore-going clothes when I stuck my head around the cabin door at 5.30, but he wasn't due on again till midnight, so I left him. By 5.45, some spares and stores the engineer had ordered still hadn't arrived, so our sailing time was pushed ahead to 7 p.m.

By 6.45, they were still nowhere in sight, so the figures on the noticeboard were again changed and we were set to leave Newcastle at 8 p.m.

The stores came down to the ship just before seven and were stowed in a few minutes. At 7.30, I came up for a breath of air and a smoke. There was hardly anyone about—one or two port employees along the quay and the boatswain and his gang standing by to cast off. I leaned my elbows on the rail, enjoying the breeze and the feeling you get when you are almost at the end of your watch, with another trip more than half over. Why did I glance towards the shadows of the wharf sheds, those ugly buildings which look the same in every port, as though I expected something to happen?

At first they came like small shadows, flickering along the edges of the wharf buildings in ones and twos. But within the space of a few minutes, they swelled into a steady stream which swarmed across the quay and up the gangway. Scores were already in the ship before the Harbour Board men realised what was happening. Even when the boatswain's gang came running, hitting out with their boots and bits of dunnage, the stream kept coming.

A few were killed, or pitched overboard, but for all the notice the others took, the men might have been so many bollards in their path.

Once on our decks, the rats seemed to split up and go their different ways. As I stood still in the half dark, watching it all, I could see dozens of them hurrying past me along the edges of the hatch combing to the crew's quarters. No doubt there were other streams heading for the midships section, the engine-room and the holds.

By the time the order was given to swing the gangway inboard, there were only stragglers left on the quay. The main body was snug within the old *Kaitiki*.

As I made my way below, everyone was talking about it, and several times when I glanced into dark corners, I seemed to see the eyes and sharp head of a skulking rat. When Slim came to take over, I told him what I had seen, and when we had cleaned up, Robbie, Bill, and I and some others sat in the mess, thresh-ing the thing out.

"Queerest damn thing ever I saw!" said the Peggy, lighting one of his endless fags. "Hundreds and thousands of them, coming on like an army. What's his nibs going to say when he wakes up?" he finished, looking at me.

Who? Johnson?"

"What are we all going to say?" It was Robbie. "A ship with so many rats isn't healthy. Rats carry plague, all kinds of sickness. I say a man's got a right to clean conditions in a ship!"

"If you could have seen them," the Peggy began again, the cigarette bouncing on his lip.

I was sure he *hadn't* seen them. He had been nowhere in sight at the time—unless he had come up to empty a bucket of slops right at the tail end of it all. Most likely, he had heard about it from some of the A.B.s.

And then, as we talked, out came the stories. The educated rat Robbie had met when he was taken prisoner by a German raider in the war; the rats somebody else had known who had learnt how to break bottles to get at the sauce inside. The worst tale of all was one the Peggy told about rats which had grown fat on human corpses during the bombing. He was just coming to the end of it when there was a noise in the alleyway and Scouse came in. He got himself a mug of tea and sat down on the bench against the bulkhead. I wasn't sure that he had heard, but the Peggy had one of those carrying voices and, in any case, he didn't know Johnson's story.

"I see they're back." Johnson was glowering at me over the rim of the mug he held cupped in both hands.

"Yes. It happened just before we sailed."

"You can feel it, can't you . . ." He hunched his shoulders

and his eyes flickered around the shadowy places under the deck-head.

The Peggy got up quickly and went across to the other mess.

Tomkins, one of the firemen on the 12-4 watch, shook his head. "It's not a fair go. There was one in the cabin just now, tearing into a bunch of bananas my mate was taking home to his girl. A man is liable to wake up and find one of the brutes making a meal of him."

Johnson stared at Tomkins, his fingers tight around the mug. "He's right, you know. It's happened before."

I expected him to go on and tell his own story, but that was all he said. Robbie joined in again then, and the talk came around to what was to be done about the rats.

In the end it was decided to call a meeting of the whole crew next day and we trooped off, feeling that at last we had done something sensible.

I climbed into my bunk and lay watching the wash of white and green water past our port, feeling the free lift and roll of the old *Kaitiki* as she headed into the open Tasman.

"Wind's starting to freshen from the north again, eh, Scouse?"

He only grunted and tried to steady himself against the locker as he pulled on his overalls.

I rolled over and closed my eyes. We were beginning to move about a good deal and I wondered if the weather would delay us. A thought struck me and I turned towards the light again.

"Did you manage to catch up with your sheila when you were in Newcastle?"

He grinned up at me as he laced his boots. "Bet your life! That's why I was adrift. It was worth it though . . ."

"Did he dock you much?"

"Couple of days. Nothing to grizzle about. If you could have seen Mary's face when I walked into the shop. She said she knew I would turn up, one of these days. She had been waiting for me."

"What, for eighteen months?"

"Yeah. It's not impossible, is it?" He bent his head and cursed as one of his laces broke.

"She must be some girl."

"As a matter of fact, she is. I'm thinking seriously of getting a shore job and settling in Aussie. It doesn't have to be Newcastle. There are plenty of other places. It's a big country . . ."

"You're right there. It's a country with a future."

"It's a wonder you haven't thought of settling there yourself

with your girl in Sydney . . .” He stood up, knotting his sweat-rag.

“ I have.”

“ What, and leave the sea? ”

“ Why not? There are times when it seems like a mug's game. And you bump into some funny customers, one way and another.”

“ Like me, Jack? ” He flashed me a knowing look, put off the cabin light, and went out.

Johnson was on duty again next day when we had the meeting, but all those not working came along to add their protest. A resolution calling on the company to take measures against the rats as soon as we reached port, was carried unanimously. A cable was drafted, putting the matter before our union executive, and we broke up feeling that we had begun to assert our rights as human beings.

There was a bit of a scandal that night when Slim fired at a rat on one of the catwalks and the slug glanced off the plates and hit the engineer in the leg. From then on, the use of any sort of airgun or pistol was forbidden. We could only watch the rats at play, and do nothing. As Johnson put it, the landlords were in full control.

For the next couple of days we had stiff Northerlies and Nor'-easters. Impossible to spend any time on deck, so we talked or slept or played cards in the mess. All the rat stories were brought out, polished up, and passed around once more, with some new ones added.

One night, a group of us sat in the mess as usual. Johnson came in at about eleven for his mug of coffee and sat down quietly.

Someone had just been telling a hair-raising yarn about a plague of rats in one of the Pacific Islands. Perhaps because he felt outdone, the Peggy lit a new fag and started to tell his famous story of the bombed tenements.

“. . . It was days before they could dig some of them out. And when they got to some they were so badly gnawed they had a devil of a job identifying them. I remember there was one kiddy we found with hardly anything left of her. The worst of it was that some of them were still alive, but trapped like, so they couldn't get away, or fight the brutes off.”

“ Jesus! ” It came from Johnson. “ Where was that? ”

The Peggy stared at him impatiently. “ Salditch, on Merseyside.”

“ Jesus! ” Johnson let out again. “ I thought you were in Manchester? ”

"So I am. But I was down that way the first part of the war. Demolition. Why? Think it's a cock-and-bull story?"

Scouse didn't answer straightaway.

He stared at the Peggy a while longer, as though trying to make up his mind about something, then glanced at me and around at the others.

"That kid was my young sister. There were more rats in those tenements than human beings and they lived better."

The Peggy's mouth had fallen open. The fag hung, forgotten on his lips.

"Well, blow me!"

"I was at sea on my second trip at the time," Johnson went on quietly, turning to him again. "Although I heard all about it when we got home . . ."

As soon as we tied up in Wellington, our delegate saw the agent and told him the state of the ship and the crew's feelings. The company said they would look into it at the first opportunity and that afternoon one of their men came down.

He listened gravely to the stories of those who had seen the rats, made a few notes, did a quick tour of the ship, then went away saying he would send down some traps and poison. When he had gone, a crowd of us held another meeting. This time Scouse was present and when he got up to speak we all listened as though he were an elder statesman.

Next morning, the secretary of our union came down to the ship with men from the Health Department and the Marine Office. After a thorough inspection of the *Kaitiki*, it was decided that as soon as our cargo was cleared, the whole ship would be sealed and fumigated.

The company was not at all pleased. Their schedule was upset, and it meant that they either paid us for standing by while the ship was being cleaned, or got rid of us and signed on a new crew as soon as she was ready for sea again. The newspapers wrote about unnecessary stoppages, another shipping hold-up, and threw out dark hints about agitators.

The company decided to keep us on, though anyone who wished could pay off.

Later that afternoon, I went ashore with Johnson and Slim Young.

"Been a funny trip, really, hasn't it?" Slim put down his glass thoughtfully and looked at us.

"I bet old Anders hopped when he copped that slug?"

"Telling me! One of the old company men too. Been with

them for years. The kind who would like to pass a law protecting all rats from cruel matelots."

We all grinned.

"You going to stay on, Scouse?"

Johnson emptied his beer, glanced down at his feet, and across at me before he answered.

"Can't say for sure. In a way I wouldn't mind another trip around this coast, then over to Aussie and back. It all depends. How about you . . ."

"I don't know. I promised myself in Sydney that this would be my last, but she's not a bad old ship. Reckon I'll go over as a passenger after this next trip though."

Scouse's face lit up; "Imagine sailing as a passenger! Nothing flash, I mean. But just so a man could soak up all the sun he wanted . . ."

"Don't you believe it! You'd die of boredom."

"Oh, I don't know, Slim. There's always the bar. Besides, a man's got more of a chance of meeting people when he's a passenger . . ."

"Well, I'm only speaking from my own experience. Some of us went over a couple of years ago to pick up one of those new freighters. The *Waikaraka* it was. It was one of the dullest trips I've ever had. A man just didn't know what to do with himself. The bar's all very well—but a man begins to drink as much as he does ashore."

Scouse and I exchanged looks.

"A man can't spend his whole life at sea, though, Slim . . ."

"Why not? There are worse ways of spending it. And there are worse ships than the old *Kaitiki*. They'll get rid of the rats with their poison gas, you see. Then everyone will forget about this trip and the old *Kaitiki* will carry on till she goes for her survey. Then the Greeks will buy her and squeeze a few more years out of her."

"Maybe you're right, Slim. See you later anyway. And watch out that Maori girl doesn't try to make a landlubber out of you!"

He left us, and Johnson and I stayed at the bar, talking.

As soon as our hatches were empty, we were all accommodated ashore at company expense and the ship was sealed. When the gas had cleared and hatches, vents, cabins, lockers, storerooms, bilges were open, there were corpses everywhere. There were rats of all shapes and sizes, and for a few days, the papers made the most of it. We were, *The Pied Pipers of the Tasman*, *A Floating*

Hamelin, and so on. There were so many dead rats that we were delayed two extra days getting rid of them and no one was allowed on again until the health authorities were sure she was clear of corpses. Slim seemed to have gone adrift, but Scouse and I and the Peggy came down every day to watch the work.

When the time came to carry our gear out of the hotel and up the gangway once more, Johnson seemed a new man. After living ashore, it was a bit of a blow to come back to the firemen's mess and the Peggy with his fag and his grey sandshoes. But although we were the same crew—except for Robbie's mate Bill, who had got into a brawl ashore—a change seemed to have come over us.

Now that we were rid of the rats, the old *Kaitiki* became a happy ship and she stayed that way for as long as I knew her.

During the next trip, the Peggy smartened up a lot. He soogied all the paintwork in the messes and washrooms and in the alleyways and repainted it all himself. He got the carpenter to plug all the old ratholes under the deckhead and around the lockers and pestered the steward until we got new cutlery and plates.

When I left the *Kaitiki* six months later, Scouse, Robbie, the Peggy and some of the others were still with her.

The last time I heard of Johnson he was sailing out of Sydney on a coaster which traded up as far as Queensland. I often wonder if he married the Newcastle girl, and whether he taught his kids to hate rats and told them how he got the mark on his cheek.

It is a long while now since there was that piece in the paper about the *Kaitiki*'s being sold and broken up for scrap. But I still think sometimes of Johnson from Liverpool who made us see the danger of rats until you get together and wipe them out, once and for all . . .

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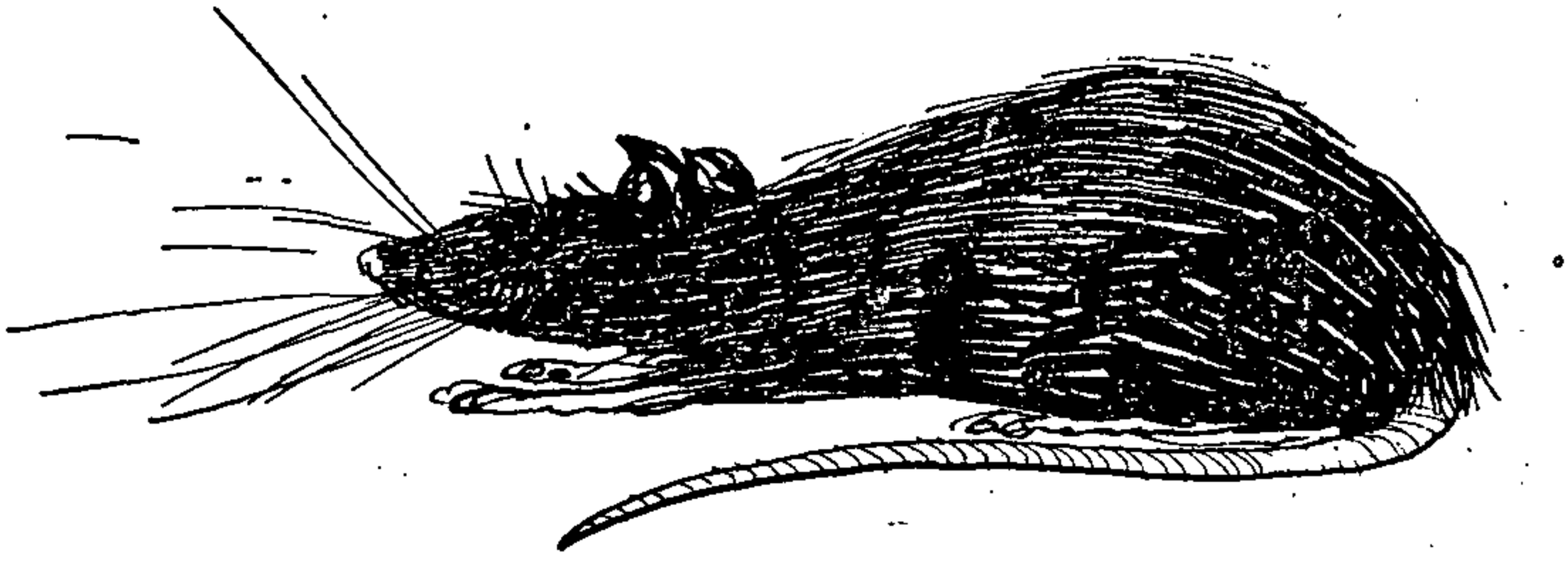

grape fun

Peel me a grape

TALLULAH BANKHEAD

It's very hot.
Cicadae out in the trees are shrilling, ear-splitting,
The very lizard is hiding for coolness under his hedge.
If you have sense you'll lie still and drench yourself
from your wine-cup,
Or maybe you prefer the look of your wine in crystal?
Heigh ho, but it's good to lie here under the vines,
And bind on your heavy head a garland of roses,
And reap the scarlet lips of a pretty girl.
—You be damned, you there with your Puritan eyebrows!

APPENDIX VERGILIANA, *Dancing Girl of Syria*
(*translated by Helen Waddell*)

Grappa Pact

The night was cool; they sat in one of the little open, mirrored rooms, and looked out from its bright square across the shadowed, humming colonnades to a scene of perpetual movement and gaiety set about hundreds of café tables and spread under silver light. Florian's string band scraped at a waltz nearby; music and singing floated across from Quadri's too, and randomly from many directions.

They drank coffee filtered into glasses.

"I haven't offered you grappa yet, Fanny," Andrew said, "as I don't suppose it would be good for you." But he tasted his own small glass of it appreciatively.

"What's it like?" asked Fanny.

"It's a little like vodka—perhaps you're a vodka addict? But it's cleaner, sharper to the taste, and, unlike vodka, it is truly

exhilarating . . . And if you like we'll make a pact here and now. Let's undertake to sit here together at this very table and at this hour of ten o'clock on any convenient day of the first week of July in 1917—when you will be twenty-eight and I thirty-four. Let's sit here together—you'll be old enough to drink grappa."

KATE O'BRIEN, *The Flower of May*

The Grapes' Progress

So in the golden-hued September weather
The master of the vineyard and his men
Bearing small wicker baskets pace together
Down the leaf-shadowed alleys, pausing when
Among the vines thick-leafed and deeply-rooted
They chance upon those bunchès heaviest-fruited
And fullest-ripened: these alone they gather
And softly in the baskets lay; and then

Convey them to a sunny spot, made ready
With little mats of woven grass; for here
They must be laid awhile beneath the steady
Streams of the sunshine. But when night draws near,
With other mats they shield them, nor uncover
Till all the dark and dewy hours are over:
So for three days, till the juice turns sweet and heady
From four and twenty hours of sun and air.

Now to the winepress. Now the mounded treasure
Load upon load into the trough is tossed,
But never heaped above the proper measure
Lest something of the scented juice be lost
When, stripped to the thighs, the peasants take their station
And tread the grapes to rich annihilation,
While all the rest stand round and laugh with pleasure
To see the foam seethe up as keen as frost.

MARTIN ARMSTRONG, *Spanish Vintage*

" Toni does so enjoy being mistress of the vintage every year; and she carries it off well, too . . . For instance, when we gave a big dinner to all the peasants who'd been picking our grapes, Toni began by chucking over a glass of wine herself, right across the tablecloth, as if by accident, of course, so that none of them should feel uncomfortable if they spilt anything afterwards—which they did, buckets of it! "

G. B. STERN, *A Deputy Was King*

Sour Grapes

A vineyard is by no means so pleasing an object as our ideas of beauty and plenty would lead us to imagine. The hop-plantations of our own country are, indeed, far more picturesque. In France, the vines are trained upon poles seldom more than three or four feet high, and are little more pleasing in appearance than raspberry-stocks in England. In Greece and Italy their luxuriance is seen to better advantage, but it falls short of the vineyard of poetry and romance.

Not many years since, there was an ill-founded notion that Blood poured upon the roots of the Vine during spring would tend to increase its fruitfulness . . .

JOHN TIMBS, *Popular Errors Explained and Illustrated, A Book for Old and Young*, 1862

Noon sun beats down the leaf; the noon
Of summer burns along the vine
And thins the leaf with burning air,
Till from the underleaf is fanned,
And down the woven vine, the light.
Still the pleached leaves drop layer on layer
To wind the sun on either hand,
And echoes of the light are bound,
And hushed the blazing cheek of light,
The hurry of the breathless noon,
And from the thicket of the vine
The grape has pressed into its round.

LEONIE ADAMS, *Grapes Making*

Panic

Once she came to an open space in a nut copse, further shut in by huge yew trees, in the centre of which stood a stone pedestal surmounted by a small bronze figure of the youthful Pan. It was a beautiful piece of workmanship, but her attention was chiefly held by the fact that a newly cut bunch of grapes had been placed as an offering at its feet. Grapes were none too plentiful at the manor house and Sylvia snatched the bunch angrily from the pedestal . . .

"Did you meddle with it in any way?" asked Mortimer.

"I—I threw the grapes away. It seemed so silly," said Sylvia, watching Mortimer's impassive face for a sign of annoyance.

"I don't think you were wise to do that," he said reflectively. "I've heard it said that the Wood Gods are rather horrible to those who molest them."

SAKI, *The Music on the Hill*

She was the prettiest I'd ever seen

LACEY

BY CHRISTIAN MILLER

AS soon as I opened the door of my flat I had a feeling that there was somebody there. There shouldn't have been; although it is a biggish flat, I've never been tempted to ask another bachelor to share it with me. For one thing, at my age, I've grown rather fond of what I call my little bits and pieces—the T'ang horse in the hall, the Ming vases on the mantelpiece, and all the other things that I've collected during, if I may say it without sounding immodest, a not unsuccessful business career—a riotous bachelor party or two might not be exactly good for their health. And for another thing, why share, I asked myself, when one doesn't need the company or the cash? And I needed neither.

I put down my umbrella, closed the front door behind me, and switched on the hall lights. There was nobody there. The drawing-room was in darkness, but as I crossed it to turn on the nearest of the standard lamps I felt, as it were on the surface of my skin, the warmth of another human being. Quickly I pressed the switch and, as the room sprang into light, I saw her.

She was standing on the bear-skin rug by the fireplace, a dark-haired girl of about twenty, the prettiest I have ever seen—and believe me, I'm old enough to have seen some. She had the biggest brown eyes and a mouth that, even though it was now hanging slightly open in an expression of surprise, just asked to be kissed. In her hands she was holding some sort of necklace and—most amazing of all—she appeared to be naked except for a coffee-coloured lace petticoat.

"Good lord!" I said, hastily turning on two or three more lights, partly to try to restore some sort of normality to the situation and partly, let's face it, to get a better look at the girl. "What are you doing here? Who are you? What . . ."

"Don't look at me like that," she protested indignantly, snatching up a sofa cushion and making as if to hide herself behind it. "I don't know what I'm doing here. What are *you* doing here, for that matter? Where am I?"

"You're in my flat," I answered, making my voice as stern as possible. "And I demand an explanation. How did you get in?"

"I tell you, I don't know," she almost shouted back. "I was just cleaning this pendant—" she held out the object that I had noticed on her hand—"and all of a sudden, I wasn't in my room any more. I was here."

She looked around her in a desperate, helpless sort of way, as if she was just going to burst into tears. The sofa cushion wasn't doing much of a job at covering her up. I took off my camel hair coat and chucked it at her.

"Here, put that on."

She bent down to pick up the coat, showing a bewitching length of tanned leg.

"Now, tell me the whole story. First of all, what's your name?"

She sat down on the sofa, looking ridiculously small inside my coat, and pressed the back of one of her hands against her forehead.

"... I ... I can't remember," she whispered.

I poured myself a stiff whisky. On second thoughts, I poured out one for her as well. She took it in an absent-minded way and swallowed a tiny sip of it, as if she had never tasted alcohol before.

"Well, what *can* you remember?" I prompted.

She took another sip from her drink, this time a bolder one.

"You're not going to believe this," she began hesitantly.

That remains to be seen, I said to myself watching her closely.

"Go on," I said out loud.

"Well," she began, "I got to London this morning ..."

"Where from?" I asked in my best detective manner.

She ignored the question.

"I got to London, but when I looked in my bag for my cousin's address, I couldn't find it. I was going to room with her, you see, till I could find a place of my own, but I hadn't written to tell her I was coming—it was a sort of open invitation, if you know what I mean. I was just planning to show up and say, 'Hullo Sarah, here I am.' But then, there I was at the station, with the taxi-driver waiting, and I couldn't find her address. So I asked him to take me to a cheap hotel, and I left my luggage

there. I told the people at the hotel what had happened, and that I'd not be using the room for long and then I went out to look for her—for Sarah, that is."

" How could you look for her if you didn't know her address? "

" Oh, it was only the address that I didn't know—I knew the flat all right."

Seeing my puzzled look, she went on, " It's by an underground station, you see, I went there once, last year. One comes out of the station and turns right, and then right again by a newsagent's, and then the flat is at the top of an old house on the opposite side of the street."

" Is that all you know? "

She nodded unhappily. " I must have gone to half-a-dozen underground stations this afternoon . . . "

And will have to go to dozens more, I thought grimly, if that's really all you know.

" That still doesn't explain how you come to be in my flat," I said sternly.

She shrugged her shoulders despairingly. " I just don't know."

" Well, what happened after you tried the underground stations? "

" I went back to the hotel and had a bath, and then I started cleaning this pendant . . . "

She held it up, and I saw that it was made of some dark metal like bronze, and that its surface was incised with a squiggly, eastern-looking pattern. " I got it at a stall by one of the underground stations. It obviously wasn't the station that I wanted. It had a street market all round the entrance, and I was just going to go back and take another train, when I saw this necklace. It was frightfully cheap, and just what I needed to go with a new jersey I've got, so I bought it. But it looked a bit grubby, so I gave it a scrub, back in the hotel, and I started polishing it."

She was turning the pendant over and over as she talked. It certainly was unusual-looking.

"And then? "

" I was feeling very blue—lonely, you know. And I remember thinking, Oh, I wish I was with some nice man, who would take me out to dinner. I was rubbing the pendant and wishing, and wishing, and rubbing—and then, *woosh*! All of sudden, here I was! In your flat, I mean."

I got up and poured myself another whisky. A large one. " You expect me to believe that? "

She started to cry. Not in a messy, boo-hoo sort of way, but

delicately, as I imagine a gazelle might cry if it came face to face with a particularly bad-tempered tiger.

"But how else could I have got here?"

She had a point there. It had been pouring cats and dogs when I came in, and even if she'd been able to walk unnoticed through the streets wearing only that almost transparent slip, she certainly couldn't have done it without getting wet. I glanced down to where her bare feet were showing below the hem of my coat. They were clean and dry; the toes, tipped with pink-varnished nails, curled up sensuously, as I looked at them, like the claws of a particularly feline little cat.

For a moment, I lost my command of the situation.

"Er—" I said. And then—"Er . . . what did you say your name was?"

"I didn't—that is, I can't remember. I sort of seem to have lost my memory. Bits of my memory, that is," she added rather hastily, rubbing at her eyes with the back of her hand.

I jumped up and offered my handkerchief. She blew her nose gratefully and stuffed the handkerchief down the front of her slip. Not that her slip needed any extra padding in front; her own torso took care of that nicely.

"Perhaps your name is on your clothes somewhere," I suggested helpfully, recalling identifications in detective novels. She pulled down the front of her slip inquiringly. I hastily averted my eyes.

"Down the back, perhaps," I suggested, risking a quick glance.

She leaned forward and I looked down the back of her slip. It was a long time since I'd been as close as that to a real live girl. Her skin, as my hand fleetingly brushed against it, was warm and velvety. Sure enough, there was a label sewn in the back of the slip; I turned it outwards. It wasn't exactly helpful.

Lacey, it read, *The World's Loveliest Lingerie*.

"Any luck?" she asked, twisting round to look at me. Her hair smelt of roses.

"I'm not sure," I said. Then, suddenly losing my head, "That is, not unless your name happens to be Lacey?"

"Is it?" she asked, leaning backwards ever so slightly against my hand. Her huge brown eyes gazed trustingly, bewitchingly up into mine. I gave in.

"I guess so," I said, with a helpless sigh. "Lacey, since you're here, how about us two fixing some dinner?"

The next morning when I went to work, I really had no option but to leave her in my flat. The dinner had been delightful—

Lacey, I found, knew exactly what to do with a steak, and there just happened to be a bottle of champagne in the flat left over from my last party. I can't say that the rest of the night had been quite so good, because, of course, I'd let her have my bed; and although the sofa in the drawing-room was one of those mammoth nine-foot affairs it wasn't very wide. I must have rolled off at least five times before my alarm clock went off.

I did my best to comb my hair with my fingers and tapped at the bedroom door.

Lacey looked even better in my pyjamas than she had done in my coat. She was already awake, and sitting up in bed, with her dark hair flowing down over her shoulders, rubbing at the pendant with the end of the silk pyjama-cord. As I came in, she glanced up looking very worried.

"It's no use," she wailed. "I've tried and tried, and it just doesn't work."

"Tried what?"

"Tried wishing myself back in the hotel, of course. If I wished myself here last night, I ought to be able to wish myself back this morning, oughtn't I? That is, unless it's just a one-wish magic."

And she went on scrubbing away at the pendant as if she was trying to rub the pattern off. I went over and took it out of her hand. It didn't look a bit magical—just a rather battered blob of metal with squiggles on it. But magical or not, Lacey certainly seemed to believe that it had transported her to my flat the previous evening. I handed it back.

"Well, what now?" I asked pleasantly.

She slipped out of bed, padded over to the window and looked out. The rain had stopped during the night and a clear sunshine was flooding Eaton Square. Lacey studied the view with evident pleasure and then turned and faced me.

"Coffee?" she suggested brightly. Clearly she was a girl with a well-developed sense of priorities.

Over coffee, we agreed that I would lend her a coat, and enough money for a taxi, and that she would go back to her hotel, get into her clothes, and then come to my flat in the evening to return my coat.

"And have a drink," I added. Somehow I didn't like the idea of her just running in, dropping the coat, and running out again. I wanted to see more of Lacey.

I was just closing the door of the flat behind me when she came running after me, looking absolutely distraught.

"Don't go, don't go," she cried, clutching at my lapels.

"I've just remembered . . . I mean just forgotten. That is, I've just remembered that I've forgotten . . ."

"Forgotten what?"

"Forgotten the name of the hotel—the one where I left my clothes."

I jumped back inside the flat and stood with my back to the door.

"But Lacey, you knew it only yesterday!"

"I know. But it was written down on a card that I've got in my handbag—I mean that I did have in my handbag. And my handbag's at the hotel. It didn't come with me, if you see what I mean. And now I don't know the name of the hotel, to go back to and get my bag and find out which the hotel is. Oh dear, whatever shall I do?"

I glanced at my watch. I was late for the office already.

"Lacey," I said, coming to a quick decision. "How much would it cost you to buy yourself a complete outfit?"

She looked puzzled. I hadn't time to discuss the question, so I took out my wallet and peeled off a bundle of five-pound notes.

"Go out and fit yourself up," I said, stabbing at the lift-button. And as the gates slid shut behind me I added, "See you at six." It was all I could do to stop myself blowing the silly girl a good-bye kiss.

The weeks that followed were the happiest of my whole life. It wasn't exactly that Lacey moved in with me, it was more that she never moved out. After a couple of days she gave up the search both for her cousin and for her hotel; she assured me that her cousin hadn't known that she was coming and so wouldn't be worrying about her; as for the hotel, there wasn't much point in her going back for her old clothes when I was giving her so many new ones. I loved seeing her in pretty things. I opened charge accounts for her at Harrods and Fortnum's and a dozen other shops, and every evening when I came home she would have something new to show me—dresses and lingerie and shoes, gloves and hats and crocodile handbags. The flat was permanently full of tissue paper and dress-boxes, but I didn't mind, for I loved seeing her so happy. Or perhaps, to be more accurate, I should say that I loved *her*.

I just couldn't help loving her, she was so pretty and so gay. Sometimes, coming in to find her sitting cross-legged on the Aubusson carpet of my bedroom, busily unwrapping yet another parcel, I couldn't help thinking that what I would really have liked in life would have been a daughter just like her. But then,

one can't have a daughter without having a wife, and I'd never much liked the idea of tying myself down to marriage. Not until I met Lacey, that was.

For she would have made a wonderful wife; I saw that at once. Not only could she cook like a dream, but she was always thinking up little ways to make my life easier, and my flat more comfortable. Why, quite early on, she'd suggested that I should let her do all the marketing for us both, and had even insisted that she should do it in cash—which, of course, I gave her—so as to save me the bother of paying monthly bills.

Then she'd noticed that a little bit of veneer had come off the Louis Quinze commode in the dining-room, and had at once arranged for it to be taken to Mallet's for repair. She'd taken a whole pile of my suits to the cleaners too—actually she'd picked out all the newest ones, which really hardly needed cleaning at all but I hadn't the heart to point this out to her, when she was so touchingly anxious to look after me. It warmed my heart to see how much trouble she was taking on my behalf, even though I did sometimes wish that she hadn't been so enthusiastic about getting my Renoir re-framed. I had liked the old frame quite well enough, and the bare patch on the wall over the mantelpiece gave the flat a rather bleak look.

Finally, when she sent away the Aubusson from the bedroom—true, it did have a very tiny cigarette-burn in one corner—I ventured to protest. It wasn't so much that I missed the Aubusson—after all, I hardly ever went into the bedroom now—but that I happened to notice that the carpet over which it had been laid was really rather dirty.

"Lacey, darling," I suggested—I always called her Lacey, to this day I don't know her real name, "Lacey, darling, why won't you have a maid? I hate to think of you slaving away, keeping the flat clean. I'm sure Mrs. Pickles"—my daily maid, whom Lacey had dismissed during the first week because she was, or so Lacey thought, thinking things that weren't true—"I'm sure Mrs. Pickles would come back, if I asked her."

"But, darling, don't you remember how she used to *look* at me?" pleaded Lacey, wriggling round so that her head was on my knees and her feet dangling over the back of the sofa. As she swung her feet upwards, the leopard-skin housecoat that she had bought only that afternoon fell slightly apart, revealing her slim smooth legs. Her hair spread luxuriously over my knees. I took a deep breath. I knew what I wanted to say—oh, how I knew it—but I was uncertain what words to use. Perhaps it would be best to play it light.

" Well, just to make Mrs. Pickles happy, would you consider regularising our situation? Will you marry me, Lacey? "

I shouldn't have said it. She sat up at once, looking shocked. For a moment, she was silent; it seemed a very long moment, during which I had time to reflect on all the reasons why she couldn't possibly want to marry me. Such as, for instance, the fact that I was old enough to be her father. Then she smiled.

" Darling," she said. " You're sweet. But you don't really want to marry me. You have a lovely life just as you are—as an eligible bachelor. Why change? "

" Because I love you, Lacey. Because I want to look after you and make you happy. Because . . ."

" Hush! " she interrupted, stroking first my face, and then my head. Was it my imagination, or did her fingers falter when they reached my bald patch. She got up and wandered into the next room, so that I couldn't pursue the conversation.

Nor could I in the weeks that followed. Whenever I raised the subject of marriage, she would grow vague and evasive. The more she eluded me, the more madly in love with her I fell. I did everything in my power to show her what marriage to me would mean; I gave her a sports car, a mink coat, diamonds; once I even tried seducing her, but without much success, for when I tried to pick her up in my arms to carry her to the bedroom I almost dropped her and had to put her down again; I suppose I'm not quite as strong as I used to be, now that I'm getting older.

The showdown came the week when we were going to give our first dinner-party. I had often longed to show her off to my friends, but she had always insisted that she would rather be alone with me, which touched me very much. Finally, however, she had agreed that we would have a dozen of my closest friends to dinner. She would dress and go out, only returning to the flat at the same time as the guests, so that they would think that she, also, had been invited from outside. We would hire a small intimate catering firm to take care of the meal, so that she would have nothing to do except look beautiful.

And oh, how beautiful she was those days. Sometimes, as we walked together down a street, I would catch a glimpse of the pair of us, reflected in a shop-window; it seemed almost a crime that so spectacular a girl should be accompanied by such a . . . well, such a middle-aged escort. I would try to pull in my tummy and stand up taller, but it didn't do much good. Not in comparison with Lacey. I had long since given up trying to make up my mind whether or not it was magic that had brought her into my life. Just so long as she was there—that was magic enough for me.

She was the most beautiful, the most adorable girl I'd ever known.

As the day of the dinner-party drew near, I just couldn't stop myself begging her once more to marry me.

"We could announce it at the party," I suggested eagerly. And then, seeing a withdrawn look on her bewitching face, I grew desperate. "Lacey," I said, "You must make up your mind. I can't go on like this, Lacey. *You've got to marry me*, or else . . ."

" . . . or else what?"

For a moment I thought that I had gone too far, that I had lost her for ever. But then she smiled.

"Darling, don't be so serious. Aren't we happy as we are? Forgive me I must run—I have to take the table silver to Garrard's to get a real professional shine for the party."

And she gave me a kiss just under my double chin, and called out of the window to the taxi-driver to ask him to come up and carry out the big canteen of silver.

How can I describe the desolation I felt when I found, two days later, that she had gone? I came back from the office earlier than usual—I had recently been made chairman and so occasionally allowed myself the luxury of leaving around tea-time—and when I first came into the flat I thought only that I had got home before her.

I called, "Lacey!" There was no answer.

I glanced into the bedroom. It was empty. Then, into the kitchen. Nobody there either. Then it struck me that the bedroom had not looked quite normal. I retraced my steps and went in.

It had been completely stripped. Cupboards, shelves, drawers —all were empty. I searched the flat like a man demented. Everything of hers had gone. Gone, too, were my matching set of pigskin luggage and the silver box containing my gold cuff-links and my pearl dress-studs. Oh Lacey, beloved Lacey, she must have taken them on impulse, as a souvenir of me.

For I knew exactly why she had left me—she had gone because she thought that I would be happier without her—because she felt that she would upset my ordered bachelor existence. Dear, generous Lacey, who thought all the time of me, and of my business. I threw myself on the bed that I had never shared with her, and wept . . .

Everyone was very kind. I cancelled the dinner-party, saying that I had had an unexpected bereavement—which indeed, to me, it was—and my friends at once rallied round to try to console me. Henry Hènriques, a very old friend of mine who happens also to

be a very rich banker, was particularly understanding; he had lost his wife a couple of years before and he knew what it was to feel sad.

It was he who suggested that I should take a holiday with him in the West Indies. He got his secretary to make all the arrangements; I was to leave almost immediately and he was following a week later.

I never tried to find Lacey. I didn't look for her—but I saw her all the same. I was driving home from Egham, where I had been lunching with my brother, when she passed me in the sports car that I had given her. A very good-looking man of about her own age was at the wheel.

She was wearing my mink coat, and she was laughing. I drew up behind them at some traffic lights. Her wonderful hair was blowing loose in the breeze and, as he stopped the car, the young man took hold of a handful of it and, pulling her head towards his with a gesture of complete possession, kissed her recklessly in full view of the passers-by.

I don't know how I avoided having an accident as I drove back to London. I have no memory of even seeing the road, or the traffic lights, or the other cars. Suddenly, horrifyingly, the whole pattern had fallen into place.

I couldn't bear to wait for the lift, but ran up the stairs two at a time, and fumbled, panting, at the front door of my flat. Reeling, I hurried from room to room, noting down the valuables that Lacey had so sweetly "taken care of" for me.

The French commode—I rang Mallet's. When, I asked, might it be ready? A puzzled voice replied that they had no record of it having been delivered to them. Then Agnew's. What advice had they been able to give the young lady who had called with a small Renoir for framing? I'm sorry, sir, but I don't think that anyone in the gallery saw her. Would you care to be put through to a partner? I rang off, and dialled the number of Garrard's. Might I pick up my silver canteen that afternoon, I asked—the one that had been brought in for a professional polish? But we don't accept silver for polishing these days, the courteous voice replied; I slammed down the receiver.

I didn't even bother to call Harrods so sure was I that all the food of the past weeks had not been paid for in cash but would figure on my account.

Only one question remained to be answered: how had she got into my flat in the first place, and especially, how had she got there wearing nothing but a slip? In an agony of pain, I raged round the flat, systematically taking to pieces everything that

would come apart. Finally, behind the water cistern, I found what I was looking for.

A pair of shabby high-heeled shoes was wedged there, wrapped in an old gabardine mackintosh. Worn out, they were the sort of things that no woman would mind throwing away. In the pocket of the mackintosh was an underground ticket from one of the less savoury quarters of London and a strip of celluloid such as thieves use to open locks.

I went to the West Indies as arranged. I had been attempting to enjoy the sunshine for five days when I got a telephone call from Henry, whom I had been expecting at the end of the week. Even over six thousand miles of cable I could detect the controlled excitement in his voice.

"I say," he said, "would you mind if I postponed joining you? The most extaordinary thing has happened. It's a bit difficult to explain, and I don't suppose you'd believe me even if I tried. Just after you left, I met the most wonderful girl . . ." The line crackled. Atmospherics cut across the conversation, so that I had difficulty in hearing what he was saying. Then the line cleared again.

". . . and there she was, old boy, with only her undies on. Such a sweet kid, you've no idea."

"Henry," I cut in, while the pips signalled yet another pound on his bill. "Has she got dark hair?"

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MONEY

Workers earn it,
Spendthrifts burn it,
Bankers lend it,
Women spend it,
Forgers fake it,
Taxes take it,
Dying leave it,
Heirs receive it,
Thrifty save it,
Misers crave it,
Robbers seize it,
Rich increase it,
Gamblers lose it . . .
I could use it.

RICHARD ARMOUR

Morning is the best time to begin a journey

SALUDA BERKELEY

BY PHYLLIS ROBERTS

NOT long after daybreak, the boy, Saul Beckett, could hear their feet making familiar speeches in the long hall outside his door. First Grandfather's oaken tread, then Grandmother's stately promenade, and last his mother's dreamy, sleepwalker's ramble, sounds looped together on mouse-soft coils of dawn.

The boy lay there a few moments blinking night from his blue-eyes, a young mole up from a dark passage. Then all at once he was awake, and making an adventure of it, climbed up out of the bedclothes on to the deck of his bed. With a gesture of fierce reclamation he then pulled a yellow plush lion—recently discarded—off a shelf, a zany beast sporting great floppy paws and a red yarn mane and tail pompon.

"Leo, I love you," Saul Beckett singsonged, and in the secret dawn he began to wrestle with the lion. Soon he was giggling. "I've got your number," he said, his pet new phrase, overheard somewhere, though not at home. "I've got your number."

His face suddenly drew together into an intense blank, and he felt a nameless foreboding. "Mother!" he whimpered. At six he was rather more the baby for having lived among older people, their treasure.

When his mother did not appear, Saul got up and walked under the vaulting archway that connected their bedrooms. Usually, on waking, he crawled in with his mother, and he often recollected, as though it were a little ship sailing out to sea, the small bed which was until recently moored up alongside hers.

"Jeanne!" he cried now, using his mother's name imperiously. This usually sent them both into gales of laughter. This morning there was no sound. He tugged at the birch-coloured blanket, almost the shade of her hair, and put his small, curled fist on the pillow. The bed was empty.

A stark panic overtook him, such as had happened once when he got an idea that the sky was going to gobble him up—it was so enormous—and he raced out of the room. Reeling down the hall, he caught an echo of their muffled voices coming from the dining-room. He clawed at the door, and his mother's lovely, and at this moment astonished, face took in Saul's wild appearance.

"Honey," she crooned. "What is it? Did you think you were abandoned?" She was dressed in dark blue, and he wailed into her lace collar.

"Saw Beckett," his grandfather said calmly. "Get hold of yourself."

The tone sufficed. Saul sniffed and looked at his grandfather. "Hullo, Feathers," he said brightly.

"Feathers" was what he called his grandfather. The name did not seem to rub that old man the wrong way—in fact, there was little Saul Beckett could do, within reason, to displease him. General Bushrod Beckett was handsome as a grey hawk, with straight grey hair and eyes grey as thimbles. But he was no longer predatory nor did he wish to be. He had changed his ambitions from that. Three wars, the loss of his son and his young son-in-law, plus much galling experience had turned him into an ardent pacifist and student of religions. A lesser man would have become a fanatic. General Beckett kept a firm grip on his intelligence, but his sympathies widened. In this transformation, involving much suffering and final peace of spirit, he had achieved that thing few men ever achieve: nobility.

Now his grandmother smiled at Saul with affection. At the same time she was always reserved, keeping her thoughts to herself. She had been a poised Italian beauty, a widow, when the general—then a major—had taken her to bride. And much of that beauty remained.

"Say hullo to Lilac," Saul's mother coaxed in her dove-cooing voice. Lilac was the neighbourhood girl who sometimes stayed with Saul. Not often and never overnight. Saul glanced in this girl's direction. "Hullo, Lilac," he murmured. He liked her all right, but she represented change of a jarring sort; she was an outsider, and her appearance usually meant he was going to be left behind.

"Hi, S.B.," the girl said with a pert but sleep-tinged smile. She was the only one who called him S.B. It made Saul feel much older, quite comradely, in fact.

"Will Auntie be coming back today?" he asked his grandfather.

"No, sir," his grandfather said.

They were referring to Aunt Extra Hand, a very old coloured person, so shrivelled and small Saul Beckett took her for another child and accepted her as such.

At one time she had lived with her husband, DesPortes Jackson, on their own property. DesPortes had not been gone long before she installed herself in a cottage on the edge of Becketts' woods. Saul's grandmother had given her the tongue-twisting name Aunt Extra Hand. She had been just that to this woman, a stranger to the Beckett place, indeed to the country. Saul's grandmother was somewhat of a tryant in the kitchen, and Aunt Extra Hand alone had pleased her. The aged Aunt Extra Hand had for years merely pottered, but her mind stayed lively. Rising early she had adopted the custom of taking breakfast with Saul. She ate like a tiny bird, enjoying, it would seem, the early-morning company of the child. Later in the day she was sometimes visited by friends or relatives; their ranks were thinning. Every November her granddaughter arrived on the New York train and took the grandmother back with her. Soon after Christmas Aunt Extra Hand would return to them.

"Why are they going about it so early, sir?" Lilac asked the general.

General Beckett sent a musing look in the girl's direction. He had with the passing of the years and the extension of his grace acquired more patience with women.

"Morning is the best time to begin a journey," he said quietly. He took Saul up on his knees. "Saw Beckett," he said, giving the words strength and authority, "your mother is going to tuck you back into bed. You must stay until Lilac fetches you for breakfast. And then please, sir, mind her words while we are away."

Saul's reply was a stricken look.

"We won't be gone long," his grandfather comforted.

"We'll have lot of fun, S.B.," Lilac said heartily, and the two other women turned encouraging faces to Saul.

"Courage, Saw Beckett," his grandfather admonished, and to back it up, gave Saul a sip of black coffee. Saul was limp as a puppy, so he added a hug. Saul was close to him, closer than anyone in the world, for, as he had grown in goodness and was not so pleased by worldly effects, he had grown more solitary. His own son had been too much the D'Artagnan like himself, and they had often clashed in the old days, though there again it was not hatred. Saul's father, Maury Mountjoy, had hardly been out of boyhood when he was killed on a frozen Korean slope. General

Beckett considered Saul a most original child; he seemed to the old man to have such outstanding characteristics and an unusual candour. Months before the birth General Beckett had searched the Scriptures for a name. His daughter at the time had not cared one way or another; she was laid low by grief, leaning utterly on others, mourning in the way of a wild swan. She had continued to mourn in that quiet, ineradicable way, but eventually she would remarry, and it would no doubt be better all round. For the time being, the old general was the strong influence, the male influence in his grandson's unfolding life. He gloried in it humbly.

"Auntie will be in later?" Saul asked, speaking further of his absent friend.

A dim misery clouded the general's eyes, but he spoke without melancholy. "I believe she has taken lodgings elsewhere," he said. "We will talk about it later. In the meantime remember what I told you about obeying Lilac." With that spoken, he put Saul on his feet and his mother led him off to bed.

"Do mind Feathers," his mother said, bending over the recumbent Saul Beckett. "And this afternoon we will have a game of marbles."

Saul Beckett's mother waved from the door, leaving it ajar, and went back to her parents. Saul lay quietly appraising the situation. Then he made a second descent from his bed and went to the window.

Under his eyes the 1946 plum-coloured Packard was turning out of the lane. All of Saul Beckett's early panic had vanished; he was simply curious. The clock face, which he could read, told him the hour—nearly six, the time when he was usually snuggling into his mother's bed.

He was momentarily diverted by a sack of marbles, bright new possessions acquired on the last trip to town. He poured them out on the bed. Their colours intensely satisfied his whole being, and he found much pleasure in the touch. Then, following the pattern, he got his sandals and dressing-gown and went into the enormous, old-fashioned bathroom. He did what he was supposed to do, even turned on the chugging taps and splashed his face. He could see his reflection, that of a fairhaired child with pale, luminous, healthy skin, a snub nose, those blue seafaring eyes of the mountjoys and, for a child, a rather witty mouth, upturned at the corners.

Pleased with his appearance, he padded down the hall seeking Lilac, who had taken up sleep where she had left off, stretched on

the sun-parlour sofa. Saul Beckett stood beside her snuffling with delight at the whinnying sounds that accompanied her breathing. He walked out of the door on to the morning-scented grass deep as a rug. The dog was waiting for him, a high-ribbed pointer, a rich red-brown and purest white—his grandfather's animal. Her name was Celestial Navigation, another of his grandmother's Italian fancies. Yet she was a starry beast. The dog came to Saul Beckett, loving his youthful company.

"Hullo, Celeste," Saul said, putting his hands, soft as two whispers, just behind her ears. Then he tickled her. She high-jinked over the gymnasium of the lawn, Saul following. They came to Auntie's cottage, that tiny brick haven wound in ivy and trumpet vines. Hanging from a lattice arcade was a brass bird-cage. The bird, a green parrot, had long flown. Saul rapped politely on the door; no one answered. Logically, he sat down on the step, an arm around Celeste, to wait.

After a while they rose, Saul turned the little black doorknob and they walked inside the cottage. The blinds were tightly drawn, the coverlet on the brass bed was without a wrinkle, the small pewter chalice where Auntie sometimes stored her teeth was bereft of this singular ornament, washtubs hung in single file, pictures were drowned in dusk, the furnishings had a strict arrangement.

The impression created was of a place one leaves for a long journey. Saul poked about a bit, but it was too silent.

Soon he and the dog wandered out along the trail leading from the back door. The dog, rather like a capricious woman, tossed her silken ears and bounded to the fence. Then she stopped dead and looked back glowingly at Saul Beckett.

"Wait for me, Celeste," the boy cried, skipping down the trail. They passed quickly from the tame land into the wild woods. That Celeste knew or sensed her rôle was immediately clear. She nosed into the forest, walking straight, like a princess, throwing back guiding looks to Saul Beckett. "Wait for me, Celeste," Saul cried breathlessly, and the dog slowed her silent footfalls. The sun was up now, travelling beside them like yellow yarn or music. Saul used his arms like oars pursuing Celeste's nimble prints. She paused eloquently before an open cave.

"The Cave of Giants," Saul Beckett cried out, like a station-master announcing his favourite town.

This honeycombed passage had served as a route to Big Spring. No one knew how the cave got there—a great wave from

the river might have struck the first blow. Saul, since joining Sunday school, gave Jesus credit—Jesus carpenter, that is. In any event it must have taken a mighty carpenter to scoop out that earth. Inside, the cave was the pale, brittle colour of a hornet's nest, traced by vines and the hieroglyphics carved there by its visitors.

Saul Beckett stopped before his own name and lovingly traced the grooves. It was his full name, Saul Beckett Mountjoy. Feathers had at first protested, not wanting to deface the wall further, but Saul had begged. There were hearts on the wall, enclosing fond initials, names and mottoes. Saul's favourite, the one that tickled his tracing fingers most, was this one. It read SALUDA BERKELEY, PASSER-BY. Time and again he had whispered that one under his breath, liking the wind-in-tree-top sound.

"Saluda Berkeley, Passer-by," he read to his audience, Celeste. The dog, whose interest lay in mouse-bin corners, sniffed out a spider. For a moment she quelled its little riot with a delicate paw, then out of boredom strolled on through the cave and out the other end. Soon Saul followed.

On that side the landscape was denser, softer. In its murmurous setting the negro population had romped in summer celebrations. Saul and the dog travelled rapidly to the brow of a hill; one side presented a view of Beckett farmland, a rough range, sometimes tilled by sharecroppers. The other view extended as far as tree-shrouded Galilee, the negro cemetery. Saul was inspired at that moment to go round by Big Spring, where he and the dog both paused for a drink. The water was tooth-chilling cold. They pressed on, climbing Goliath Hill, highest in the county. Celeste picked her way carefully, with an upsloping elegance, her earlier frivolity having changed to something serious. Saul sat down on a log to rest a moment. The place had a peculiar odour: fish and winds of all seasons and slime and slither.

The light was getting stronger, moving slowly now towards the white monastery of noon. Saul went on. The next hill was smaller and on its side was the negro cemetery. A stark Mason jar, with two wax tulips tilting downwards, suggested a recent visitor. There were, however, few new graves. The population was burying itself in widespread corners of the earth; this spot was too far away and maybe too naive. Saul took time to reconnoitre, a rare pleasure denied him by his grandfather, who always walked on musingly. The squirrels were shifting leaves above their heads, but Celeste, well trained to ignore distraction, merely stood by, waiting.

The dog suddenly seemed to have presentiments. A low,

prophetic growl sounded in her throat, but her long dog lips were closed tight. She began to walk, her feet touching the earth solemnly, prophetically, like snowflakes. Saul Beckett fell into step behind her, reciting a poem. "Jack be nimble, Jack be quick," he sang out. Stopping to pull together the tassels of his dressing-gown he delightedly caught echoes of his own voice or at least some kind of humming from Galilee way. As they approached the ledge that overhung the church and ceremonial yard, the sounds grew pithier.

The dog growled again, but it was a talkative sound. She, too, was obviously out to find the source of the humming. There was a close grove of trees, then a parched avenue where last October's grass fire had scoured the land black. Now walking upwards again towards the ledge, Saul and Celeste trod the very rafters of Galilee. And when they looked down from the ledge it was clear that something was going on.

There was a whole choir of voices. Celeste showed uneasiness, but when Saul asked her to sit down beside him, she did so. In that loud loft they had a perfect view of a procession winding into the church. The church itself was a local landmark, likewise a monument to that dusky mason who stretched those yellow bricks into a minaret and Gothic gables, himself long lain on Galilee Hill. There was a fleet of cars parked about the yard, a black galleon was moored at the back entrance.

Finally this moving script of black and white was caught up into the church. Saul marvelled. Public gatherings were unknown to him, innocent wonder now pinpointed his ambitions. This time Celeste drew back. Saul Beckett had to call her twice before she obeyed, head hanging. Down the last hill they went like two divers, holding their breath. They touched the main path, and dust rose up behind Saul's sandals. He put a hand upon Celeste's silver-studded collar and dropped to the church steps. He extracted from several thoughts, one purely-spoken instruction—to go inside the church.

He and the reluctant Celeste walked across the threshold and stepped up two stones on to a stringy carpet that led to the front of the church. They began to follow this path as though it had been drawn expressly for them. The room was hot as a hole, and Sabbath smells still clung to corners. Saul Beckett was only dimly aware of the people, so fixed was his concentration on the front of the chapel.

There, engulfed in flowers, was a black box. Saul observed the box was like a tiny ship; indeed, it was the little *Mayflower*

of someone's soul. Down the aisle the two walked. Saul Beckett thought once that he overheard his name. He peered about but did not stop his journey.

A man in black robes was speaking, his head bent, his elegiac voice flying up among the rafters. Occasionally he would lift great butterfly sleeves and then, as his arms descended, the black robes would settle back around him with a sudden and completed whoosh. He was quite young, miserly with his amens. Saul Beckett walked up to the black box, the dog quivering by his side. He gazed down. There, on a plushy pillow, was a face that might have come from far off, dropping through centuries of space and time, growing smaller, less fiery until here it was at the end of its journey, landed on a pillow like a tiny moth. A shrivelled, child-sized body was attached like a tiny key to the head. Above that flown-down face were light tufts of ivory-coloured hair, the skin parcel-brown. The wrinkles had sunk out of sight; the head of a withered infant emerged. But there was something left of experience, some flame of character, that gave identity.

" It's Auntie," Saul Beckett said in a loving way. He began to carry on a little random. conversation about new marbles and things of interest to them both.

Every pair of eyes was trained on Saul Beckett. A shocked hush had fallen on the preacher's tongue. A woman in the front row, light-coloured, bosomy, demurely gowned in total black, with swollen eyes and teetering heels, came forward—Aunt Extra Hand's granddaughter. There were many hard rumours about this woman; one that she was the mistress of an infamous Sicilian politician, another that she had made a fortune as a madame. Probably neither was true. However, she showed her true colours when she bent down and gently gathered Saul Beckett to her talcumy bosom.

" Why shouldn't he come to see her? " she cried defiantly. " He was her friend." With that, tears began to stream down her face.

Saul Beckett was conscious of being the centre of rather dismaying attention. " Mother," he whimpered. " Feathers."

Magically his grandfather appeared, followed by his mother.

" Your mother has come for you, Saw Beckett," his grandfather said quietly. Saul Beckett took his mother's hand. The dog bounded out of the church and was shortly seen going over Goliath Hill.

" I am sorry, Ellen," Saul Beckett's grandfather said to the woman at his side. " Saw Beckett was last seen in bed."

The woman nodded. " Little Saul Beckett," she said, heart

in her eyes. She looked over at the preacher, who had removed himself to the sidelines, glaring.

"General," the granddaughter said, "would you kindly speak on her behalf?"

She went back to her seat.

General Beckett's countenance had a most isolated expression. He laid his hands on the Bible and, opening it, let his eyes fall on the upturned passage. It was fantastic.

In his deep, faraway voice he began to read, "'As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed. As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things . . .'"

He lifted his head and gazed, dry-eyed, over the congregation. His voice was strong and young. "Into Thy eternal mercy I commend her spirit . . . Saluda Berkeley." The old man's voice broke then, almost a whisper on that last word. "Passer-by," he said.

The congregation spoke as one concerted voice. "Amen," they cried together.

General Beckett returned to his pew, and with the same gentleness the preacher renewed the sermon.

Saul Beckett willingly got into the car, taking in the familiar smell of leather and petrol and the household recollections of their trips. His mother had not yet spoken to him, her face strange and sad. Still, when they were sitting side by side she reached over and patted his hand, for her own comfort, perhaps. Saul Beckett's slightly grubby fingers curled around hers.

"Auntie is gone," he said peacefully.

And that was his complete conversation all the way home.

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GOLDEN RAIN

We children were taken to watch the fireworks in the Crystal Palace grounds. We sat on a balcony and gazed, in half-scared wonder, at huge set-pieces of the Armada, of the Battle of Trafalgar, at illuminated portraits of kings and queens . . . and clapped with joy as rockets whizzed upwards, and golden rain and showers of multi-coloured stars cascaded down against the background of a deep violet sky.

KATE TERRY GIELGUD,
An Autobiography

COVENT GARDEN

BY CLEMENCE DANE

High above Covent Garden in the very heart of our famous market, Clemence Dane, writer, sculptor, painter and potter, lived and learnt to love this corner of London as her own. And when the Market is no more, when the last crate of cabbage has been swung on the back of the last departing lorry and the teeming streets are left silent and still, her record will remain. From her richly rewarding book, *London has a Garden*, we have chosen an extract telling of those things she was already missing as she wrote the history of her beloved "Garden."

SO many changes! I miss the wicker baskets that the porters used to carry on their heads stacked like cones in an ice cream shop—the last I ever saw has become a wastepaper basket in the Garden church. I miss the gypsies, handsome, swarthy men with their painted carts, their docile ponies and their eloquent, fortune-telling women. These are always good looking, and picturesquely dressed. They sum you up with an eye as sharp as a jackdaw's and their gold earrings swing energetically as they tell you exactly the sort of fortune that you want to hear.

But the gypsies are going, going, gone with the lavender-criers and the Italian ribbon-sellers who moved like scarecrows with scarves and ribbons dangling from their rigid arms. Gone, too, is the muffin man with his basket and baize apron and his evocative bell.

"Oh, who has seen the muffin man
That lives in Crumpet Lane?"

Nobody, these days. His wares are wrapped in "Cellophane" and sold conventionally in shops, and you cannot get them on

Sunday in the Market any more. The muffin man's bell used to be the sole sound that broke the Market's one day of perfect peace. It ended at midnight when the vast green door of the Covered Way rolled up like a Brobdingnagian blind, and conversation rose uninhibited to my front floor windows.

Sometimes the view of the carts and the flares would be suddenly blocked by a cheerful face grinning in at me. This was Len, standing level with the windowsill on the top of his lorry load of boxes. He would throw them down one by one, checking as he threw. "One daff—two daffs—one violets—walls—walls—walls . . ."—one soon learnt what would be a "good cheap" next morning. Long after I had gone back to bed I would hear the boxes being dumped into the shop below and passed on down the ladder to the cellar. Thump, thump, dollop, thump! It went on for hours. Sometimes, half-asleep, I used to think it had gone on for years and years, and wonder what century I was living in.

The Market has a queer effect on one's sense of period. I don't believe that any other plot of ground in the world gives one such a sense of being alive in all periods of a city's history at once. One is downright jostled, sometimes, by crowds of invisible personalities who share the place with you.

I know what I'm talking about. I lived in the Garden for thirty years, and I have learned that it is as enduring in its collective life as a beehive or a play by Shakespeare. It makes and obeys its own laws and is swayed by private moods. It asserts itself through an individual at one moment, at another through the movement of its crowds.

There are Sunday mornings when the Garden remembers its youth and is as pleasant as a country field. Then sheep graze once more in the Long Acre, and the youngsters engage in the football war, while in a far corner a gardener is planting out rows of the new-fangled salads which Queen Catherine of Aragon brought with her from Spain. At other times the Garden is all rollicking Victorianism. But the atmosphere can also be suddenly so thick with the stale, cabbagy smell of yesterday's poverties that it catches the throat. Then strangers say: "The fogs are bad this autumn." But it isn't only the fogs. The Garden has a random pulse, and when that quickens its past overflows into its present and has an effect on all who live there whether they know it or not.

I know, and I still bless my luck that I lived in it for so long.

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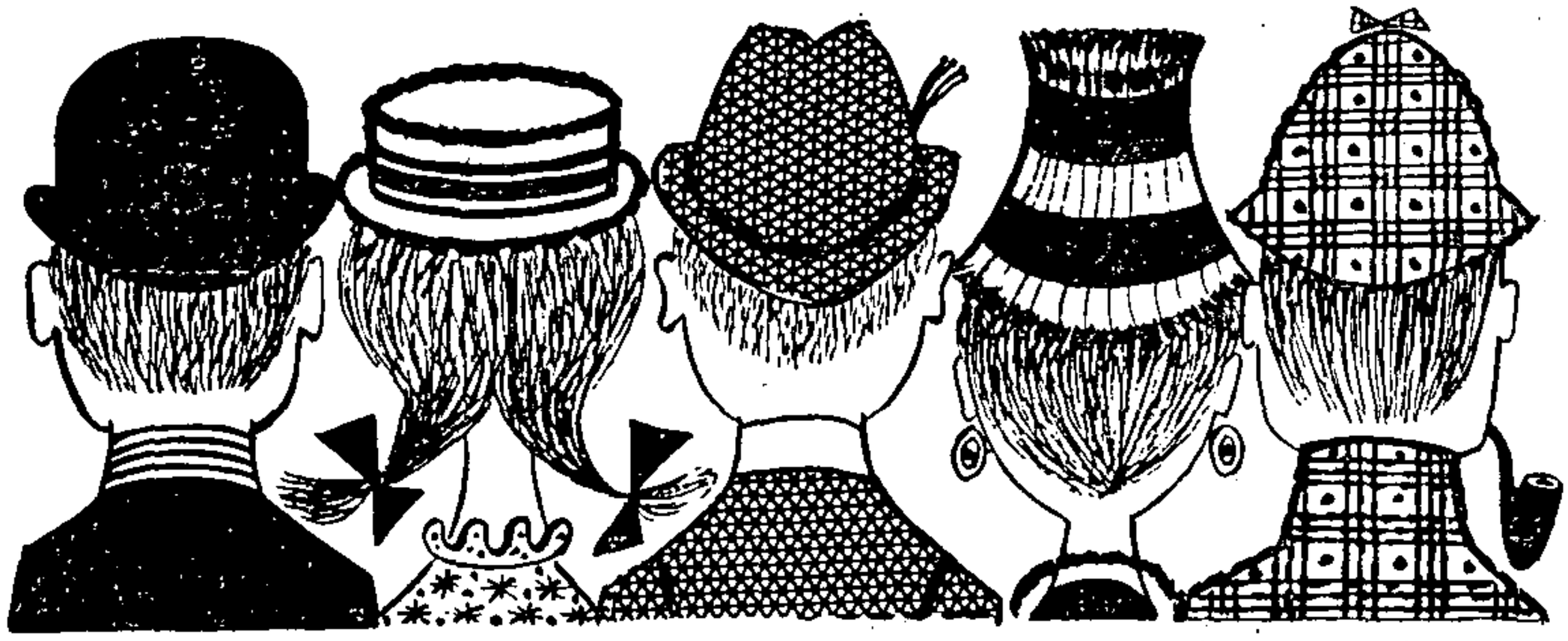


NEVER A DULL MOMENT

The Earl and Countess of Effingham were among the number. "They were always seated," said he, "opposite each other at dinner; and no sooner was the dessert placed before us, than my lord, ordering his lady to open her mouth, threw dragées (sugar-plums), into it across the table, with surprising dexterity."

NATHANIEL WRAXALL, *Historical Memoirs*, 1834

may i feel said he
(i'll squeal said she
just once said he)
it's fun said she
(may i touch said he
how much said she
a lot said he)
why not said she
(let's go said he
not too far said she
what's too far said he
where you are said she)

e. e. cummings

Unholy Mess

We are very fond of pineapple, all three of us. We looked at the picture on the tin; we thought of the juice. We smiled at one another, and Harris got a spoon ready.

Then we looked for the knife to open the tin with. We turned out everything in the hamper. We turned out the bags. We pulled up the boards at the bottom of the boat. We took everything out on to the bank and shook it. There was no tin-opener to be found.

Then Harris tried to open the tin with a pocket-knife, and broke the knife and cut himself badly; and George tried a pair of

scissors, and the scissors flew up, and nearly put his eye out. While they were dressing their wounds, I tried to make a hole in the thing with the spiky end of the hitcher, and the hitcher slipped and jerked me out between the boat and the bank into two feet of muddy water, and the tin rolled over, uninjured, and broke a teacup.

Then we all got mad . . .

We beat it out flat; we beat it back square; we battered it into every form known to geometry—but we could not make a hole in it. Then George went at it, and knocked it into a shape, so strange, so weird, so unearthly in its wild hideousness, that he got frightened . . .

There was one great dent across the top that had the appearance of a mocking grin, and it drove us furious, so that Harris rushed at the thing, and caught it up, and flung it far into the middle of the river, and as it sank we hurled our curses at it, and we got into the boat and rowed away from the spot . . .

JEROME K. JEROME, *Three Men in a Boat*

The Kettle's Tale

The fire to the kettle said,
" Sing up, kettle! Tell what you know!"
" I know the grey Tom-cat is dead
because the old broom told me so.
" I know the cow is out of milk,
last night there was an empty pan,
" at midnight mistress wore her silk
and ran away with a gentleman.
" I know the hound is hunting a fox
(it was the wind that told me so),
" and master kicked away a box
from under his feet, an hour ago."

ELIZABETH J. COATSWORTH, *The Creaking Stair*

Bus Driver's Hospital Game

If you have to stop for one reason or another, never wait until the conductor rings the bell. If you start moving quickly and unexpectedly, and if you are lucky—and in slippery weather you have a very good chance—people will fall on top of one another. This looks extremely funny from the driver's seat. (Sometimes the people themselves, who fall into a muddy pool and break their legs, make a fuss, but, alas! every society has its bores who have no sense of humour and cannot enjoy a joke at their own expense). GEORGE MIKES, *How to be an Alien*

Team Work

. . . Strangways' mind took in the three blind men. They were tapping slowly towards him down the sidewalk. They were about twenty yards away. He calculated that they would pass him a second or two before he reached his car . . .

Vaguely he registered the moment of silence as the tapping of the white sticks ceased. It was too late.

As Strangways had passed the last man, all three had swivelled. The back two had fanned out a step to have a clear field of fire. Three revolvers, ungainly with their sausage-shaped silencers, whipped out of holsters concealed among the rags. With disciplined precision the three men aimed at different points down Strangways' spine—

The three heavy coughs were almost one. Strangways' body was hurled forward as if it had been kicked. It lay absolutely still in the small puff of dust from the sidewalk.

It was six-seventeen. With a squeal of tyres, a dingy motor hearse with black plumes flying from the four corners of its roof took the T-intersection into Richmond Road and shot down towards the group on the pavement. The three men had just had time to pick up Strangways' body when the hearse slid to a stop abreast of them. The double doors at the back were open. So was the plain deal coffin inside. The three men manhandled the body through the doors and into the coffin. They climbed in. The lid was put on and the doors pulled shut. The three sat down on three of the four little seats at the corners of the coffin and unhurriedly laid their white sticks beside them. Roomy black alpaca coats hung over the backs of the seats. They put the coats on over their rags . . . and reached down to the floor and picked up black top hats and put them on their heads.

IAN FLEMING, *Dr. No*

My dearest uncle,

I wish you could *have witnessed the 1st May*, 1851, *the* greatest *day in our history*, *the* most beautiful *and* imposing *and* touching *spectacle ever seen, and the triumph of my beloved Albert. Truly, it was astonishing, a fairy scene. Many cried, and all felt touched . . . It was the* happiest, proudest *day in my life, and I can think of nothing else. Albert's dearest name is immortalised with this* great *conception,* his *own, and my* own *dear country showed she was worthy of it* . . . QUEEN VICTORIA, *to Uncle Leopold on opening of Crystal Palace*

A man cannot spend all his life in frolic.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

NIGHT IN THE CITY

—and the wise boy had taken right over

BY BRIAN HENRY

HE looked like an Irishman. He walked along, alone, next to the wall, amid the others hurrying in the same direction. He had black hair and sad blue eyes. His face was thin and leathery from being out in the open air. The sad eyes and the melancholy face; the Irishman away from home. The others paid no attention to him as they strode along in twos and threes towards the gate up ahead, where a queue of cars was turning in.

There was an odd dignity about him. His baggy blue suit was, nonetheless, a suit; he wore it with the same pride as a man at Ascot might wear morning dress. Although his shirt was grubby and the collar bent up on one side, the tie was neat, meticulous, and blue. He always wore a tie, even at home. He liked to feel dressed.

A racing paper stuck out of his raincoat pocket; it was folded at a page where there were lots of lists, with queer symbols and cross-references; he had been studying it all the evening. There were pencil marks in the margin. He had made them while he had been walking along. But he had to stop when he turned in at the gate; by then the excitement was too great . . . He couldn't think straight with everybody hurrying so, half-walking, half-running; the crunch of anxious feet on the cinders. Then he was paying his money at the turnstile, and passing through.

He stood under the shadow of the huge East stand. A great letter *O* hung on a placard above his head. There were other letters just like it at regular intervals all around the great oval arena. In front of him, the expanse of grass, and the track, all floodlit.

It was one of the fanciest greyhound stadiums in Britain. It was an exciting place on a Saturday night, a place where hundreds of people devote themselves to winning each other's money.

A smooth male voice came over the loudspeakers, " Good evening, ladies and gentlemen." Seamus O'Callaghan listened and grinned.

Tonight was the night he was going to make the forty quid in his pocket into a hundred, and maybe, if he was lucky, into a thousand. After that, home to Connemara. He was going to have a decent holiday first, and buy presents for the family. There should, he reckoned, be plenty left to buy himself a business, a little shop. Just what he had always wanted: a little place in Connemara. Anything to get out of this hole they called London; this stinking, money-grabbing, landlady-ridden dump.

The arc-lights came on. They blazed down on six dogs that came trotting round the track with their kennel-maids. Beautiful animals, graceful. Number One looking as though it wanted to get on with things, was dragging its girl along, muscles straining. One to Six, walking quickly in single file, passed the letter *O*.

Seamus is a Gaelic name. They called him Shay at home. But in Paddington he was Jim Callaghan, which is the English translation. It didn't do to be too obviously Irish, even in London which is full of Irishmen. It had taken him just two weeks to find that out. " I don't want no bloody Irishmen in my 'ouse," one landlady had told him, " drunken bastards."

Shay looked across at a bookie who was rummaging through a leather bag full of money. The crowd's expectancy began to rise with their tobacco smoke. Shay thought of Monday. He would be on the boat, far from this seething madhouse of eight million struggling lunatics. He thought of the loneliness he would leave behind; the silent English huddling behind their newspapers; the girls who shook their heads when he asked them to dance; the cold, greasy chips in desolate cafeterias.

He turned to a man standing alongside. " 'Tis a fine night." The man looked up from his programme, surprised at being spoken to. Shay leaned closer and held out a packet of cigarettes. " Smoke? "

The man shook his head and frowned. " I smoke a pipe." He turned to his programme and brought it close to his face.

Shay nudged him and said, " What do you fancy? " The man stiffened and withdrew imperceptibly.

" Try Number Four," he said to Shay, and then walked off towards a bookie where he put ten shillings on Number Six. Shay watched him glance back then move away into the crowd. He said, " Bastard," between his teeth. The snub still hurt a little. He was a country boy. He should never have come to this place.

Money, that was the seducer. Any fool could earn himself good money in London. Yet it was funny how difficult it was to hold on to it. Arriving after the war, it had taken him nearly two years to save up the forty pounds in his pocket.

A bell rang. The dogs were in the traps, tense, barking. The hare started off, carried along on a wire that went right round the track. Picking up speed it flashed past the traps. Then the lights went down; the traps flew open and they were off. Six bounding, straining streaks, each one turning itself inside-out trying to catch up with an impossible meal. The crowd roared, men and women screamed. Six dogs, streamlined, ducking round the bend, up and down. Five hundred yards of deceit. A bunch of wet noses across the line together. A crescendo of noise. Then a short sigh from five thousand throats.

The lights went up; it was all over. A sign appeared on the board: *photo*. Silence came again. The mass greed subsided for fifteen minutes.

Shay smiled at the excitement of it all. Where else could one see such naked animalism in human beings? People with their hair down, exposed, primitive. It made him tingle. The first race . . . There were eight. Shay was sitting out the first three. It was part of his betting plan. O'Brien had told him how to do it.

O'Brien was a wise-boy from Donnybrook in Dublin. O'Brien knew all the bookies, all the systems. He was a barman; read every racing paper there was to read. He was a whizz with selections. O'Brien had come to London for the easy pickings; a quick kill, then back to Dublin to live it up.

Shay was dimly conscious that O'Brien had been quite a time over his quick kill. About fifteen years. But then, you couldn't rush these things. O'Brien had done it in the end; he had won a thousand pounds a month ago right here. In the pub afterwards, he had, for the price of six double whiskies, told Shay his system: a system that never failed. Well, thought Shay, the proof was in that cool thousand.

O'Brien hadn't been around for nearly a month now. Shay thought of him enjoying himself in Dublin: walking up O'Connell Street, eyeing the girls. Ah, living like a king, he was . . .

Shay tugged out his racing paper and scanned down the list of runners for the second race. There was a dog he fancied in this race. All the same, he wasn't going to bet on it. In O'Brien's system you didn't start betting till the Fourth race.

During the fourth double whisky, O'Brien had said, " If

you're going to do a system, there must be no side-tracking. You have to be ruthless, go right down the line with the system. It's the same with the money. If you bet five quid, you must not think, My God! If I lose this, I'll be eating chip sandwiches for a fortnight! You have to think of the five pounds as so much mathematics. Cold-blooded, like."

Shay patted his breastpocket just to make sure it hadn't been picked. He smiled. The nice fat bulge was still there. Forty quid, in ones. Better than in fives, it felt bigger, more substantial in ones, somehow. Just for a thrill, Shay slid his left hand inside his jacket to the breastpocket and stroked the top of the roll with his fingertips. Lovely, lovely, lovely! Stacks of money, he thought: all mine! His eyes narrowed as he tried to think of it as a lot of mathematics. Forty arithmetic units. Or, if you broke it down into ten-bobs: eighty units. It was a struggle to think of it that way. O'Brien, he decided, must have a great mind to be able to think of a thousand quid like that, all nonchalant. Forty was bad enough. It would be a terrible thing if he lost it.

A man came up to him with a trayful of peanuts hanging from his neck. Shay said, "No thanks," and the man moved on, muttering. Shay leaned his elbows on the thick tubular steel of the crash-barrier. One thing about O'Brien's system; it gave you three races to get acclimatised. You had three-quarters of an hour to look around, gape and enjoy. A man's game, this was, run by men for men.

Down by the railings where the bookies were, men in white gloves kept going mad, waving frenziedly to other men in white gloves on the other side. Over on the far side were the enclosure and the clubhouse. Up there were the nobs, the big boys, and their women. Up there, they bet in hundreds, and had dinner at the same time. O'Brien had been up there. Shay wondered how they could be rich one minute, poor the next, and rich again the next, and still eat dinner; it was beyond belief.

Away to the right were the big Tote odds indicators. Six black dials, one for each dog. They fascinated Shay. Each board showed how its dog was doing in the betting. The pointer showed how much you would win if your dog came in first. Money. Everything was in money, here. And that's why the people had come. The dogs were incidental.

Five thousand people, mostly moving about. Few people stayed in any one place for long. They went down to the bookies. They shuffled in queues up to the Tote windows. They changed places, hoping to change their luck.

The bookies shouted; the bookies never stopped shouting

before a race: " Six to four the field! " Step into my web, bring your money, make me rich. They kept changing their odds, chalking new ones on their boards, yet the odds always seemed much the same from bookie to bookie. Shay wondered how they knew.

O'Brien's system was really very simple. It depended on the fact that the third favourite invariably won at least one of races Four, Five and Six. The reason for this was very simple, too, although O'Brien had spent nearly two hours explaining it. It seemed that races Four, Five and Six were the races where the big boys collected. O'Brien had been up there, so naturally he knew this. Now, O'Brien didn't say that the races were fixed. It was just that, in those particular races, the money seemed to be laid in such a way, you see, that the dogs found themselves able to run in only one particular pattern.

Why the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth races? Well, that was just the way it happened to be. It was a convention, see, a nation-wide convention, well-known to all the big boys in dog-racing, but not to anybody else. O'Brien had found out, and now Shay knew. " And don't go telling anybody else! "

Of course, it sometimes happened that mistakes occurred and the third favourite did not win in any of those particular races. In that case, the arrangement carried over into the Seventh and Eighth races.

Why the third favourite? Yes, well, this was the bit that O'Brien had spent so long in explaining.

It had to do with the odds. On the favourite and on the second favourite they tended to be a bit short, see: and there was not much of a return on an investment. So the big boys tended to back outsiders. And by the time they had laid all their money on one of these outsiders, it would wind up as third favourite. And, as third favourite, the dog would have a decent starting-price: 5–1 at least, and maybe 10–1. Get it?

There were other factors. But Shay, after several double whiskies, had been too far gone to listen. The only thing that mattered was this business of the third favourite . . .

It was nearly time to bet. For several minutes the six dials had been swinging this way and that. Already the favourite and second favourite were firmly established. The third and fourth were pretty close together; but one of them was edging ahead of the other. Obviously, Shay decided, a late burst of big-boy money. He fingered the banknotes in his pocket nervously. The first bet was to be five pounds. It seemed a ridiculously large amount now the time had come. But five pounds it was to be. O'Brien had

worked it out for him: five pounds the first bet. Amen. So be it. It was only a mathematical numeral, after all. And it was nothing compared with later bets.

Shay went down to one of the Totalisator booths. He stood near the window where they sold tickets in units of one pound. " Wait till the girls have finished walking the dogs around, and are putting them into the traps. Then bet," O'Brien had told him. Shay looked over his shoulder. Yes, the girls were just about to shove the dogs into the traps.

" Number Four to win. Five tickets, please," Shay told the woman at the window, and thrust the money under the grille.

He gulped. Five quid, gone! And all there was to show for it —five bits of paper with numbers and a date printed on them.

The race was on. Frantically he dashed up the steps to where he could see. The dogs were at the halfway. Already that strange, primeval roar was rising in the throats of the crowd.

" C'mon, Number Five! "

" Lovely, Baby! Now, out on your own! *Out on your own!* "

" Ah, did you see that? He let that other bastard in on the inside! "

Shay searched and searched for Number Four; it had a black waistcoat, but he couldn't see it anywhere. And then it was all over. A second later he saw Number Four. It was in a group of three dogs trailing in behind the others.

He couldn't believe it. The result was going up on the board above the dials. " *First*, Number One. *Second*, Number Five. *Third*, Number Six. *Tote Win:* Four and Sixpence."

He felt sick: five pounds down the drain! So quickly. He had had it in his hand only half a minute ago . . .

Race Five. The hands on the dial were beginning to swing into position. A bookie, down in front of Shay, lit up a cigar, grinned at his assistant.

" Peanuts! Roasted peanuts! "

A sea of glum faces. A sprinkling of happy ones.

Shay glowered up at the indicator, then glowered across at the clubhouse. It was infuriating to have to depend on the whims of manipulators. Shay's bet for race Five was to be ten pounds: the amount decided upon by O'Brien. This, too, was part of the system—the betting pattern.

The pattern here consisted of doubling up on the previous bet. According to O'Brien, it was a good thing to lose on the Fourth race. It meant, apparently, that you were more likely to win on the Fifth and Sixth. That being so, you could safely increase your outlay.

Shay fingered the notes in his breastpocket and shivered. Ten pounds was getting beyond the stage where it could be thought of as mere mathematics. Shay had never bet more than five shillings in his life before. And if he didn't win this time, the next bet would be twenty pounds!

" Number Six, nine times and once for luck! " said Shay, and plonked down the money.

" 'Ere! Yer lashing out tonight, aren't yer? " the woman at the window said, grinning at him and passing him the tickets. Shay didn't look at them, just clutched them in a sweaty hand.

The dogs were being shovelled into the traps. Number Six was last in. It had a red and white striped waistcoat with Six on the side. " Go on, Baby," Shay murmured, and then the dogs were all safely inside, and the hare was coming round.

Shay gave a last look up at the indicator. And suddenly he paled. An extraordinary thing had happened. When he had gone to buy his tickets, Number Six had been clearly third favourite. Quite a way behind the second, yet well ahead of the fourth. But, in the meantime, the third and the fourth had switched places. The odds on the fourth had shortened considerably, while those on the third had lengthened.

Shay's heart sank. The big boys had placed their bets late. Number Six was only fourth favourite now. It was too late to change his tickets; the betting-windows had all closed. The traps clanked open and the crowd roared.

Shay couldn't bear to watch. He went down below the stand and leaned against a litter-basket. Another ten quid down the drain! Fifteen in all: the savings of nine months wiped out.

He lit a cigarette, but had difficulty with the match. A gloomy man in uniform with a broom in his hand was making a premature start on the litter. Shay inhaled deeply, and began to calm down. It occurred to him to go home, but only for a moment. He knew he was a moth; and upstairs was a big bright candle.

Shay glanced at the indicator automatically as he came up again. " *First*, Number Six. *Second*, Number One. *Third*, Number Three. *Tote win*: Sixteen shillings."

He couldn't believe it at first. He thought there must be some mistake, or that they had forgotten to change the indicator from the last race. He asked somebody.

" You blind, or something? " the man replied. " Look at the indicator! "

Shay said, " Sorry, I left my glasses at home, and I was down in the lav."

"Oh!" said the man. "Well, Six won. By a street. The bleeder."

Shay said, "Thanks."

He collected eighty pounds from the Pay window. A win of seventy pounds. Afterwards, he just stood there on the terraces and hugged himself, and grinned from ear to ear like a madman; he thought of himself and O'Brien walking up and down O'Connell Street together arm in arm.

And then he had a thought, and the grin went from his face. The fourth favourite had won and it shouldn't have. The fact that he had backed it and won seventy pounds was beside the point.

Shay was in a quandary. He had a hundred and five pounds in his pocket. Which was fine. But, in order to walk down O'Connell Street with O'Brien and do himself proud later in Connemara, he needed a thousand. The question was this: would the third favourite win the Sixth race, or were the big boys losing their grip? Two races in a row had gone astray: it looked bad.

Shay knew what O'Brien would have said: lay your hundred quid on the third favourite. You must follow the system. It's mathematics!

Race Six. The kennelmaids and the dogs were coming round.

Shay waited till the last minute then went down to the Pound window. Just as he opened his mouth, his nerve failed him. He couldn't do it. A hundred quid: five years' savings! A thousand pints of Guinness! It was too much; the roll of notes stuck in his clammy hand.

"Sorry, I've changed my mind," he said, and turned away.

"That's right, dear," called the woman from the window. "You 'ang on to it. Buy a fur coat for the missus."

Shay stood on the terraces, down near the track, and watched the dogs flash round. He felt shaken. Connemara seemed to be fading into the murky night. He thought: I'm a coward. I'll never win, now.

Number Three in the white waistcoat won; it was the favourite. It streaked home by three lengths to the rapturous applause of the crowd.

And now Shay was utterly confused. He had believed, without doubting, the infallibility of the big boys. And they had failed. He was still seventy pounds to the good but he felt deceived, all the same.

And then he remembered that O'Brien had said, "If the system fails, the arrangement carries over to the Seventh and

Eighth races." Shay lit another cigarette and watched a girl who bet on every dog jumping delightedly up and down. The question now was, how to bet; whether to lay thirty-five on one race, seventy-five on the other; or what? In the end, he didn't do anything. Time went by and it was too late. He just stood there and felt foolish.

The red and white stripes of Number Six won the Seventh race. But it was an outsider. An outsider! An outsider-insider-inside, Shay mouthed numbly.

Then the reality suddenly became obvious. The next race was the Eighth; and it was the last. If the big boys didn't win now, they would lose their shirts. And it was utterly inconceivable that the big boys should all lose their shirts. So, *the third favourite was bound to win.*

Shay was calm now. He felt good. He had a sense of power. He knew which dog was going to win the last race. Brains, that's what it was, brains. And brains meant money in this world. After this, he was going to go down to one of those big tobacconists' in the West End and treat himself to a fat Havana cigar. And he was going to light it and stroll all the way down Park Lane smoking it . . .

The indicator was doing funny things. The favourite had suddenly slipped back to third. An outsider had just as suddenly gone up to second favourite. The others were going up and down like yo-yos, too. Shay grinned. Manipulations were going on, he decided. The big boys were making sure this time.

Shay looked at the crowd. He thought, I bet there isn't a single one of this mob knows what I know. Not even the bookies. From the indicator, he could see that a lot of money was going on the Eighth race. He was glad. More money meant better odds. The dials were steadying now. The pattern seemed pretty well established. Number One looked to be the third favourite.

Shay went down a bit earlier than usual. He wanted to find a window where he could get five-pound tickets, or two-pound-ten, at least. It would take the girl quite a time to punch out a hundred one-pound tickets. He glanced over his shoulder to make sure about dog Number One, then went below.

Shay surprised himself. He stood at the window and felt neither fear nor regret as he passed the money through to the woman. He looked calmly at the roll of notes in her hand. He thought: I've conquered myself. It's just a lot of mathematics now.

" A hundred pounds' worth of Number One to win," he said, as composed as though he were ordering a cup of tea.

" Check, please," the woman said over her shoulder. Shay watched without blinking as a man came up to her shoulder and did a routine counting check on Shay's money; then the same man made an entry on a sheet and initialled it.

" Here! Buck up, will you? " said a man behind. " The race will be on in a minute." He had a wad of money in his hand twice as big as Shay's. Shay turned away with his tickets and strolled back upstairs.

It was raining quite heavily when he got out there. He could see sheets of it silhouetted against the lights. It didn't affect the racing, of course, or the crowds; the people were under cover. The dogs got wet, that was all. And yet, Shay had a moment of uneasiness as he looked down at the track . . .

They were off! Shay picked out Number One straight away. Even at the first bend, he could see it was going well. A big brown dog in a red waistcoat with the figure 1 on the side. Great bounding strides: a powerful dog. By the second bend, it was in the lead. And by the third bend, there was only one dog in the race. Number One, three lengths clear of Four and Six. Shay knew that he was grinning. He couldn't help it. He sensed cigars being lit up there in the clubhouse. He waved across at them.

And then it happened. Going round the fourth bend, Number One slipped and stumbled. Some of the crowd groaned, and some shrieked. It was only momentary; the grass and the rain. The dog recovered at once. But too late.

Number Four was through the gap in a flash, surefooted at thirty-five miles an hour. Number One couldn't make up the gap and lost by half a length. Second. Second. *Second.*

Shay just stood and stared at his handful of tickets, all useless. Then he started to swear. And he blasphemed, and he shouted and he screamed. He tore the worthless tickets into small angry pieces and hurled them on the ground. And then he wept. Other people nearby were weeping and having tantrums, too; but it was no consolation. The rain swirled in under the roof of the stand. The wind blew the litter around: cigarette-ends, programmes, the losing tickets of eight races . . . thousands of them.

Shay joined the crowd as it shuffled towards the exit. A great cone of humanity being funnelled through a concrete neck. The masks were all down in place now.

Shay was alone with his thoughts. It seemed incredible: the big boys had lost, en masse. A whole battalion of them . . .

" Attention, please! In Race Number Eight, an objection has

been lodged against the winner. Please hold on to your tickets." The loudspeaker crackled, then went silent.

The crowd stopped, turned, and let out a low inarticulate groan. There were curses, one or two cheers. A woman, with bleached hair and a harsh cockney accent, banged an elbow into Shay's chest, and said, " 'Ere, what's 'e talkin' about, eh? That Number Four was the winner. I saw it, I tell you, I saw it! "

A man with glasses and thick lips was shouting at the crowd, almost beside himself. He had a single two-shilling ticket in his hand. " I won't 'ave it! It's not fair, it ain't! Number Four won by a length. Look! Here's me ticket."

Shay stood and waited for the official announcement. He stared across at the clubhouse. People could be seen moving about behind the glass windows. A woman in a yellow dress and a man with a newspaper stared down at the track. Sheets of rain, left to right across the lights. Shay buttoned his raincoat and pulled up the collar.

" Attention, please! In Race Number Eight, dog Number Four has been disqualified for interference at the first bend. And so, the result is: *First*, Number One. *Second*, Number Six. *Third*, Number Two. I will repeat that . . ."

There was a howl from the crowd. A fight broke out near Shay. Two policemen darted into the middle of it. Everybody was shouting, arguing. Two men jumped up on to the fence, bent on getting to the clubhouse to register a more direct protest. They didn't get far. The police were too quick. The language in the air was appalling. The announcer finished . . . " Good night, everybody! Good night! "

Shay was already down on his knees, searching. The heart inside him pounded like a steamhammer: there was six hundred quid's worth of tickets lying around here somewhere. But all in bits, small bits. He was frantic. There were thousands of small bits of ticket on the ground; lots of people tear up their tickets when they lose. And every second or two a gust of wind blew the debris round and round in great swirls.

After five minutes Shay had found only one corner of one ticket. It was heartbreaking. He should never, he told himself, have torn up his tickets before hearing the official result. It was one of the standard rules of betting. He kept grabbing at tickets as the wind blew them past. A little wail of panic kept coming out of him: inhuman, like the noise from a concentration camp. His hands were getting torn and his nails broken from scratching around on the hard concrete. He half-sat, half-crouched on the ground. He did not look up . . . there were several others like

himself working just as busily: a dozen grovelling beachcombers under the East Stand; each one intent, oblivious, stripped of dignity.

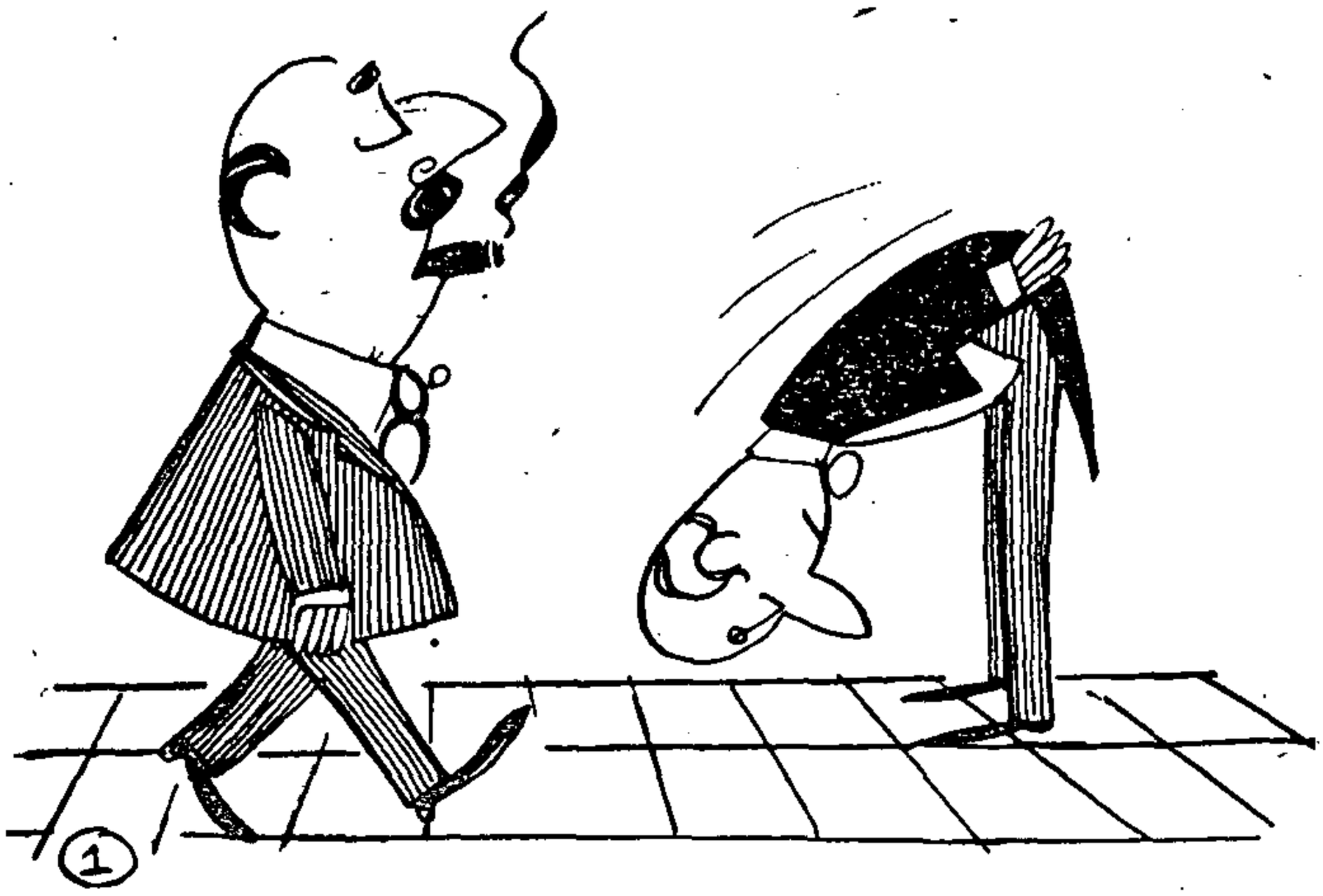
A sweeper, with a cap on the back of his head and a protruding lower lip, said to Shay, " If you're looking for a ticket, you've got a fat hope, I'll tell yer. You should see the mountain of rubbish we get after each meeting. Bloody near as high as the stadium." He walked off. Shay could have cried, but he went on searching.

After a quarter of an hour, he had found three bits of ticket. But there were several hundred other bits lying around somewhere.

It was hopeless. Except for one or two other beachcombers, everyone had gone. Shay was hot. He sat down on the concrete terraces and rested his chin on his knee. There was a hunted look in his eye as he stared across at the clubhouse; like a fox, cornered. He could see a number of people up there still; celebrating. He thought: so that's how you do it, is it? If you can't win by fair means, you just arrange for a dog to be disqualified. You rotten bastards!

Other people can lose their shirts, but not you. Making me grovel. Degrading me. May you rot in hell, the lot of you!

Shay got up and went home. He had his hands in his pockets as he walked to the station. He turned into the entrance and



fished in his pocket for the fare. And then he thought he saw O'Brien; disappearing down the stairway. It was quite a shock. It looked just like O'Brien from the back view; that sandy hair and bald patch, and the too-wide jacket with the sagging shoulder-pads.

Shay bought his ticket and hurried down the steps. " O'Brien! Hey, O'Brien! " Several people turned around, including the man with the bald patch. Christmas! It was O'Brien.

There were no trains yet. He walked quickly up to O'Brien.

" Begob! I thought you were back in Dublin."

O'Brien turned around. He had a surly face; he did not smile. He just looked at Shay with a slightly contemptuous expression as though the man in front of him was an idiot.

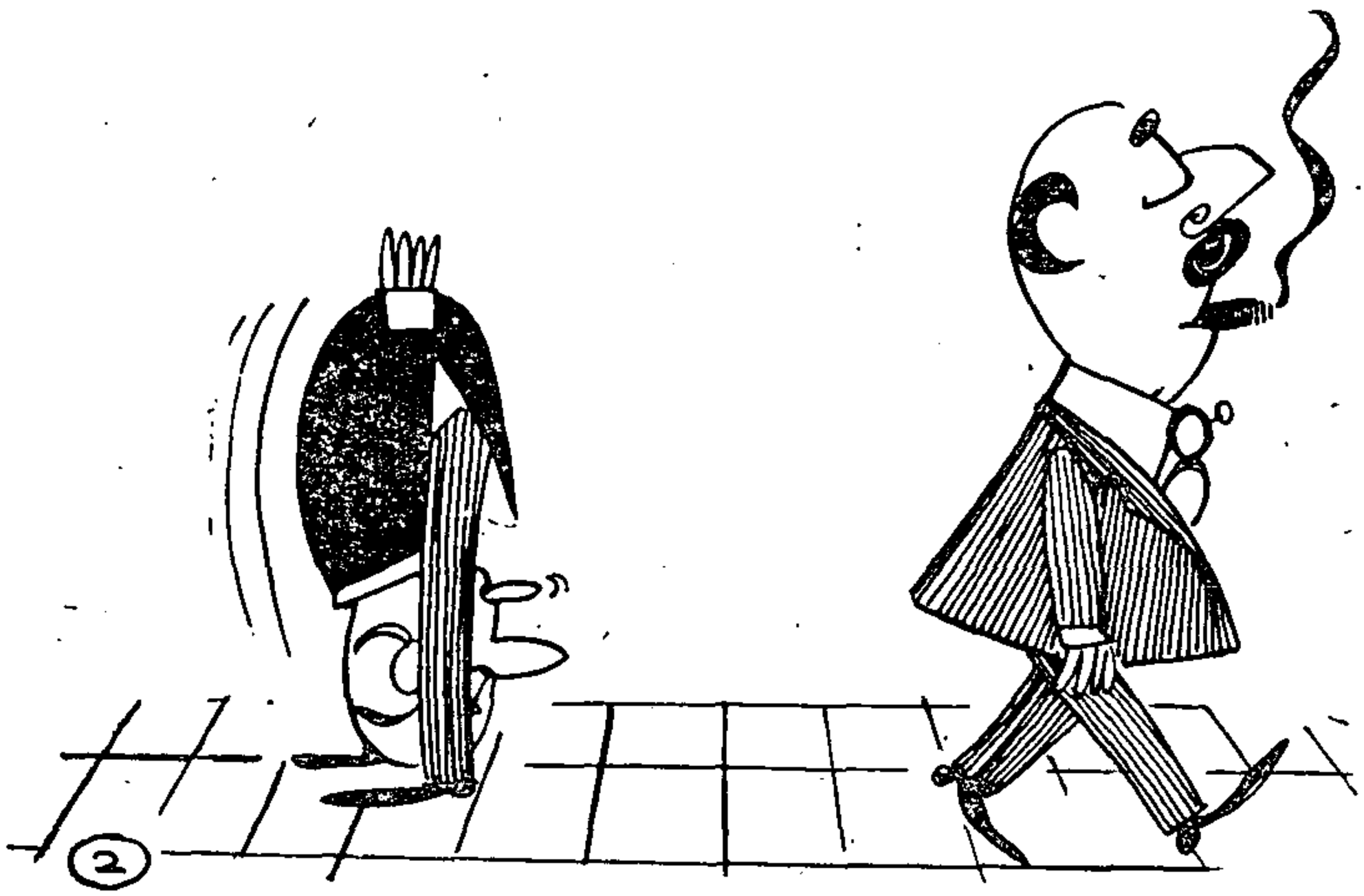
Shay went on, " Well, did you win? " He knew very well that O'Brien had not won. When O'Brien did win he was full of it. And he always took a taxi and had a cigar.

And yet, Shay could not understand how O'Brien could have lost.

" The system," Shay insisted. " It won in the Eighth."

O'Brien just looked blank, as though to say, " What system? "

Shay said, " You know. The system where you back the third favourite in the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth. Then, if it doesn't win, in the Seventh and Eighth, too. Well, it came up in the Eighth tonight. Weren't you on it? "



Shay was very earnest. But he could see that O'Brien had lost a packet, and he was glad. It made his own fortunes seem not nearly so bad.

"I guess you ran out of money before the Eighth," he suggested. " Never mind. I lost, too."

O'Brien walked on a couple of paces then turned back. " Listen, O'Callaghan. I'm going to tell you something. For your own good." He caught hold of Shay. " You're a bloody idiot, see. There's no such system as the Third Favourite System. I made it up in the pub, so's you'd buy me whisky. Get it? I used you! If you bet on that system, then you're a simpleton."

Shay was aghast. He felt goose-pimples rising all over him. " But . . . but, what system do you use, O'Brien? "

O'Brien let go of Shay's coat. " Well, I'll tell you, if you keep it to yourself. I bet on two dogs to Place. That's my system. And it lost tonight." He grabbed hold of Shay's lapels again. " You lost your money tonight, O'Callaghan, didn't you? Well, it serves you right for listening to the ravings of a man when he's drinking. You, an Irishman, should know better."

" But you said you'd won a thousand quid. You couldn't do that on Place betting."

" O'Callaghan, you're even more of an idiot than I thought. And because you're such an idiot I'll tell you something. I bet in two bobs, see. I've never won more than a quid in my whole life."

" But you said you'd been up in the clubhouse, and knew the bookies."

" So I have. Any fool can go up in the clubhouse. You just pay a few shillings more, that's all." O'Brien took out a packet of cigarettes and lit one. He didn't offer one to Shay. " Dog-racing is a mug's game, O'Callaghan. Now, get the hell out of my way and don't come near me again."

Shay went. For a while he didn't know whether it was he or the platform that was upside down.

Yet, by the time his train came, he was feeling much better. Shay had been envious of O'Brien and his skill. But not any more. Shay knew that he would probably never see O'Connell Street again; but then, neither would O'Brien. He decided to pick his friends more carefully in future.

As the doors of the train closed, Shay caught sight of the clock on the platform. He would get back just fifteen minutes before closing-time, just in time to have a pint or two. To be sure, even in Dublin they didn't have pubs as nice as his local.

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Odd how these valleys cut off sound

SELDOM SEEN

BY JOHN SIBLY

THE horses pulled up by a ring of beeches whose leaves fluttered silkenly in the everlasting wind that flows over the Plain. John, the elder boy, tossed a superfluity of hair back from his forehead. "Any idea where we are, Peter?" he asked. "We're not in the danger area?"

"Not today," said the one called Peter, a trim, brown person whose riding-clothes fitted him neatly. He jerked his head to indicate the flagpole, a thin dark crack in the sky's edge, on a down two miles away. "The flag's not up," he said.

"Just as well," his companion answered, as a dull resonance of gunnery, like the threat of an approaching war, came from the ranges at distant Larkhill.

John spoke to his horse, kicking its sides as it circumnavigated the clump of beeches.

"Wait a sec, Peter," he said, pulling a map from his pocket, "let's see where we've got to."

The two were boarders at a minor public school set at the edge of the Plain, from which, almost all day, one could hear the thud and grumble of practice firing. Huge areas of the Plain were occupied by the Army, and the public were admitted only at their own risk when firing was not in progress. For the two boys, the weekly ride which they had persuaded their parents to let them take as an "extra" was not so much a sport as an escape, together. Today, for instance, they had cantered for miles, past Tilshead (where boys were always breaking bounds in search of spent shells and cartridge cases), by the ghostly desolation of the Sham Village, which distant gunners were persistently knocking about, until now they were isolated atop a down like an enormous wave, a terrestrial roller, in the gunnery-buffeted silence of the wind.

"You don't need that!" shouted Peter, as his mount began to trot. "Straight on 'll take us to Imber."

"I'm not so sure," called his friend, trying to study a map that jerked up and down with the movement of the horse. "There ought to be a road here . . . Hold up!" He ended by speaking to the bay, which had stopped abruptly beside the black polo-pony his companion rode. Horses and riders paused, staring, where the ground, scarred by a rutted white track, fell steeply from the forehooves of the animals into the darkness of a deep silent coomb.

Even Peter seemed taken aback. "I thought this was the way we came a fortnight ago," he muttered.

"It is, isn't it? Look, there's a farm marked here—no, it isn't—yes, here's the valley—no, that one's got a stream in it."

"We can ask at the farmhouse," said Peter, nodding in the direction of the group of buildings that lay at the bottom of the glen.

"Do you think anybody lives there?" asked his friend. The farm looked deserted; it was sunk so deep in the sullen windings of the valley that even now, on a July afternoon, it was completely submerged by shade. A box of a house, slate-lidded, with two smokeless chimneys; and a half-square of farm buildings, set about a yard in which no manure was heaped. Behind it was a curve of silent trees, magically tranced and still, as though not merely sheltered but in some way insulated from the winds on the Plain.

"Probably they've all been turned out by the Army," he added. He could not think of any better reason. But he felt an immense repugnance to any descent into that valley of shadow.

"Come on," was Peter's only reply and, kicking Blaze, the polo-pony, he forced it down the steep slope to the track. The bay followed, but both animals seemed to go reluctantly, mincing, digging in their forehooves, as though they shared the unwillingness of the elder boy.

"There've been no animals down this track," John called when he had started to follow his friend along it. "Your hoof-marks are the only ones."

"Perhaps they don't bring the cattle out this way," Peter shouted back.

"The track's clear, though. It isn't weedy."

"Army lorries," Peter said.

It seemed probable enough. The military presence was everywhere. The pulse and anger of artillery burdened the air, growling beyond the farther down like a caged beast.

"Look how the shadow's moved up the hill," Peter added. "It's eaten that hawthorn since we saw it first."

His friend did not answer. He only knew he was exceedingly unwilling to cross that shadow-line. "Peter," he called.

"What is it now?"

"Nothing, only . . ."

"Only what?"

"Don't let's go on."

"Rubbish!" said Peter decisively. "You can't find the way home for us, can you? Besides, I'm thirsty. I want a drink."

He drove the pony onward, and in a moment was devoured by shade. His companion hung back a little, and the bay slackened its walk, as though sharing a single reluctance with its rider. But then he pulled himself together, kicked the bay's flanks, and passed on into the shadow. Where Peter went, he went.

The hoofprints of the polo-pony, scarring the virgin road under his nose, seemed somehow ominous. Where had he read of a cave into which the tracks of many animals converged, but from which none led out?

"Funny how these valleys cut off sound," said Peter. "There seemed nothing but gunnery just now, didn't there?"

John agreed numbly. At the moment that he had crossed the lip of shade, the thumping of the gunfire had been cut off. A dank silence seemed to fill the coomb like water.

"There is a farm marked, but it can't be this one," said the taller boy, desperately seeking reassurance from his map. "Lark-hill couldn't be that way, if this were it."

He pointed in the direction from which the gunnery had been heard. "The track leads the other way out of the farm on the map . . ." He looked at the glare in the blue which showed the bearing of the sun.

But Peter, near the end of the descent, laughed.

"Who said it was deserted?" he asked jeeringly. "It's only just been done up!"

Indeed, the paint on the door and woodwork of the house was relatively new. Yet it was a dismal place, at the bottom of that valley of gloom, its broad upper windows seeming to scowl either side of the door like a nose.

"Let's go up to it and ask the way," said Peter, when no dog barked at their approach.

"It can't tell us, can it?"

"Silly! I meant the people in it."

"Are there people in it?"

"That's what I'm going to discover."

But here they encountered a slight difficulty. The horses would not go up to the house. First the bay backed and snorted as she was turned towards it; then Peter rode Blaze at the little garden gate, only to be nearly thrown when she stopped as suddenly as if refusing a jump.

"We'll have to get down," said Peter decisively. "You hold the ponies and I'll go up and knock."

"Hitch the horses," said his friend. He indicated the yard gate. "They'll be all right there," he said, with an assurance he did not feel.

"You can hold them, can't you?" said Peter, a smile on his face at the other's odd manner. "It'll only take a minute."

"No."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Only that you aren't going up to that house alone."

Peter gazed at him while he dismounted from the bay, took both horses, and led them towards the gate. "Oh, all right," he said suddenly, with an air of humouring his companion. His tone was petulant, but a smile showed he was inwardly proud of this irrational devotion. The horses followed docilely as they were led to the farmyard gate, making no difficulty now their tails were towards the house. The boy unbuckled one rein, slid it through the other and beneath the top bar of the gate, and fastened it once more.

"Ready?" asked Peter, quizzically waiting.

"All right, now." John vaulted the low wall and stood beside his friend.

"What made you say I mustn't go up alone?" Peter inquired, as they approached the door.

"Don't know. Looks odd, though, doesn't it? No dog, no animals, yard as clean as a ballroom; it must be deserted."

"They've just moved in," said Peter, "the paint's fresh. They haven't brought their stock yet. That's all."

"Have they moved in?"

"There are curtains in the windows."

"I don't like the air," said John suddenly. "It's—stagnant somehow. As if it hadn't been changed for a hundred years. It's got that smell—like standing water has."

"It's out of the wind," said Peter.

"Yes, but even so, on the Plain . . ."

Peter lifted the knocker and struck repeatedly. They heard the knocks re-echoed inside with the hollow hardness of an empty house,

"You see, there isn't anyone—" the bigger boy began when the attempt had been repeated. He broke off suddenly, and both boys looked round.

"Who said there wasn't any stock?" asked Peter. A snuffling, snoring sound, gluttonous and porcine, started somewhere close at hand.

"But there isn't," the other said, turning sharply to scan the small garden, and then running to the low wall that overlooked the yard. He came back slowly. "There's nothing there," he said. "Look for yourself."

"There's no need to look," said Peter.

"What do you mean, Pete?"

"It's inside the house."

"You mean—"

"A pig must have got in." He tried the door vigorously as he spoke.

"How could a pig have got in? It's locked."

"They always lock the front doors of farms. There's sure to be a side door on the yard."

"Pete, you're not going—" He moved to stop his companion. But the younger boy was already scrambling into the yard. "If it's inhabited they can get the pig out themselves."

"They're not at home, John," Peter called from the yard. "It must have got in while they were out."

John followed him over the low wall. A few yards farther along there was indeed a door in the farmhouse wall. Peter gave it a push and it yielded easily. John grabbed his arm.

"Peter, don't go inside."

Faintly, once more, came the sound; now it seemed from above them and to the left.

"Why ever not?" Peter's laugh was gay and confident. "They'll be glad to find we've got rid of it for them."

The boys crossed the big flagged farmhouse kitchen, echoing and empty; looked vainly in door after door.

"Listen!" said John, as they came out into the narrow passage hall. A slow, raucous snore was coming from upstairs.

"That isn't a pig," said John.

"Somebody having a nap, that's all," Peter answered. But his voice was no longer confident or gay.

"Pete, you're not—" John began; but in a sudden burst of resolution his friend was halfway up the stairs. John hurried after him, but Peter was the more nimble, and in a moment had disappeared at the stairhead. John was alone.

Panic, the panic that always lies in wait in empty houses, rushed up and seized him as he found himself at the landing, confronted only by bedroom doors. For a moment he wavered, uncertain whether to run, to shout for Peter, or to stay silent where he was. Then he pulled himself together, and took a step towards an arch through which he thought his friend must have gone. As he tried to pass through it, something barged against his left shoulder.

It was like being tackled by another player at football. A heavy, inert body met his shoulder with a lumpish resistance. But, unlike a tackle in football, it yielded to his thrust with the massive, ponderous reluctance of a floating object rather than the firm vigour of a human opponent.

Astounded rather than frightened, John turned to face it, and was softly butted in the chest by the return charge of some solid, yet well-upholstered thing. Stepping back, he stared unbelievingly at the space under the arch. A moment more, and the same object again brushed past his chest, with the gentlest of touches. John was suddenly aware that the original collision had set something soft and heavy—a sack perhaps—swinging in the arch, and its subsequent assaults had been the consequence of its oscillation. And yet he could see nothing there.

His eyes went slowly upward to where, at the summit of the arch, a heavy iron hook, intended originally perhaps for a lantern, projected downwards. He began to think about the significance of that hook. His thoughts were not pleasant.

"I've tried all the rooms except one, and that's locked." Peter's firm voice rang out as he came striding round the angle at the end of the bedroom corridor.

"Nothing?"

"I think it's in the bathroom. Probably locked from inside. Anyway, that noise has stopped, hasn't it?"

"Look out!" barked John as his friend reached the archway.

But Peter, looking at him in amazement, walked right under the hook and out on to the landing.

John stumbled forward and thrust his arm into the space through which his friend had passed. He met with no resistance.

"I say, what's the matter, old chap?" Peter asked. "You're all fidgety."

"Let's go outside."

They had reached the side door when the noise began again: a dreadful descending gurgle ending in a sucking screech, then

changing to a high bubbling, followed in turn by a hoggish suction. Both boys stood paralysed for a moment; then they were out in the yard with the door closed behind them.

The weather seemed to have darkened since they went inside. The shadow which lay over the valley was surely heavier, the air yet more stagnant and more still. Its ill scent seemed to have a new and rank component, whose source was certainly near at hand. Above them on the right, the gluttonous squelching rose in tone, then was interrupted suddenly by a familiar gush.

Peter's laugh was too heavily burdened with relief.

"We've been getting jumpy in there," he said, his eye measuring a green pipe which grew up the wall from the rough stone of the yard. "Someone's been having a bath, and they've pulled out the plug. The waste's running away. That's all our—"

"Pig, do you mean?" asked John, likewise overacting his lightheartedness. But Peter did not reply. His mouth sagging open, his brown face an antique mask of terror, he was gazing up at the spot where, atop the green pipe, the waste from the bathroom gushed from a leaden branch into a cast-iron head.

"Whatever's the matter?" asked John, startled at his friend's expression, yet so reassured by his discovery he felt that nothing could now be wrong.

"John," croaked Peter, in a voice hardly audible above the gushing waste, "it's the water."

"Of course it's the bathwater," answered John, as the waste-pipe gave a few ultimate gurgles, sucks, and squelches which would have been terribly eerie half a minute ago. "Oughtn't it to be?"

"Yes," answered Peter in a whisper, "but it oughtn't to be red."

Beside his friend now, John turned and gazed up at the end of the dreadful, bleeding tube, hanging there like a severed artery on the outside wall. He seemed unable to take his eyes from the grisly sight, even to look higher at the ground glass of the bathroom window which, anyway, revealed nothing.

A fearful, inhuman scream, rising and terror-filled, vibrant, more powerful than human lungs could make it, and prolonged as no human utterance could ever be, filled the valley, bursting from the air behind them, echoing from the walls and flinty yard all round. Peter froze for a moment, then suddenly spun to face the uproar.

"The horses!" he exclaimed. "They've smelt it!"

Indeed, the bay was already on her hindlegs, forehooves

whirling; a moment more, and the rein had parted, trailing a pair of leathern ribbons on the ground; and both animals were off at a gallop up the glen.

"After them!" shouted John, glad of any pretext for action, for escape from the dreadful scent and from the house of blood.

They were over the yard gate in an instant, and pelting after the beasts. It was hopeless, they knew, to run after a horse on the Plain; the animals would scud back to the stables without them, and they would be left alone in the hollow, six or eight miles from anywhere.

But the horses came quite suddenly to a stop and began to graze peacefully a little up the glen road, past the buildings. The bay turned and nuzzled John's hand as he came up with her. In a moment he had buckled the reins together, and both boys were in the saddle. Blaze bridled and whinnied as Peter turned her towards the road, then quieted as quickly when she saw she was not going back to the farm. A trot developed into a canter, the canter to a gallop the boys could scarcely have controlled had they wanted, as the animals felt the rough chalk road under their hoofs. Flints truck fire from the shoes of the pony galloping ahead, and, spurned from their soft bed, flew dangerously in the air. But despite these distractions, even at the speed they were travelling, John noticed one thing; the prints the polo-pony was cutting, deep in the soft track, were the only ones; the marks of their own inward journey had already disappeared completely.

Supposing, thought John as he galloped, they had come looking for us from the school?

Ahead of them lay the tidemark of darkness, the shadow-line that lipped the grass like a fringe of foam. Peter shot out into the sunlight, Blaze tossing her head and shying as she did so. The bay followed and started; not surprisingly, for as they left the darkness of the hollow a distant crash and growl of thunder smote their ears; the constant mutter and thud of the Larkhill barrage, skimming across the shadow in the coomb as over still, flat water.

For one moment, when at last they were able to pull up their horses in the healthful sunlight of the Plain, they turned, and looked back into the deep dark glen. The house, squat, permanent, solid, lay there with its outbuildings, smokeless, silent. Then they turned the animals and set off at a long canter across the sun-stroked grass and the windy solitudes leading to Tilshead.

Nothing was said as the animals galloped side by side through the fresh, gunnery-haunted air. Once, skimming behind a far ridge, a line of humps, like metal camels, were glimpsed

suddenly; then, rising like submarines from the wave of earth, a line of tanks came rapidly into view. The boys paused to point them out to one another. Then they turned the animals' heads once more for the stable.

As they did so, John suddenly said, "Peter, I wonder: does it do it always?"

"Does what?" asked Peter, though he thought he knew the answer.

"It was running when we first came into the house," said John. "And when we went," he added. "And they're always short of water up on the chalk."

Peter did not answer. Nothing more was said by either of them till they were back at the stables near the school.

"Here, look at this!" exclaimed the groom sulkily as he took the bay from John. The boy followed his gaze to the off foreleg, where a flap of skin, the blood already dried and blackened, was hanging loose halfway down the cannon-bone.

"It can't be helped," said Peter quickly. "They had a fright and the bay reared. She must have cut herself then."

"Fright? Where've you been taking 'em to get a fright?"

"We went into a farm to ask the way."

"There isn't no farm the way you went between Tilshead and Imber."

"There's one marked here," said John, showing the map. Then, less confidently, he added, "But it does seem rather off the route we took."

"What's that?" asked the groom, turning to attend the animal's wound after giving the map a glance of cursory incomprehension.

"Seldom Seen, it's called here," said John, reading the words he had been unable to make out on horseback.

"Here, what? You didn't go in there, did yer?" asked the groom, now startled.

"We went in to ask the way," said Peter.

"And did you speak with no one?" said a voice behind them.

The boys turned to see the brown, inscrutable face of the riding-master, straw-chewing, regarding them from the stable-side.

"There didn't seem to be anyone at home," said John. "At least—"

"The horses didn't like it," Peter said, "so we came away."

"Ah," said the riding-master, and said no more.

John plucked up courage to address that formidable silence. "What I can't understand is, I'm sure we've been that way a dozen times, and never seen the farm."

The riding-master wordlessly chewed his straw.

"And I've drawn a line on the map, through the trees we passed. Seldom Seen is nearly two miles away."

"Ah, ah," said the riding-master.

"But if the map's right, then it just isn't there."

"Wasn't there, maybe, when the map was made."

"You mean it's been built since? But it looks a hundred years old."

The riding-master looked significantly at the groom, who took the horses inside. The two boys, seeing the men seemed disinclined to speak, said good afternoon and, getting no reply, slowly mounted their bicycles and began to pedal away . . .

"D'you think they've seen it?" asked the groom as his employer came in to look at the bay's injury.

"Sure enough they've seen it. You could see the fright on their faces. And look at the sweat the bay's in."

"Well, what about all they say happens to chaps who see it?" the groom asked with an anxious look. The other shrugged slightly.

"There was that lad from over Imber way," the groom persisted.

"Years ago," said his employer. "These are healthy lads. It may be nothing'll happen."

From the Plain above them came, louder than ever, the dull commentary of the guns.

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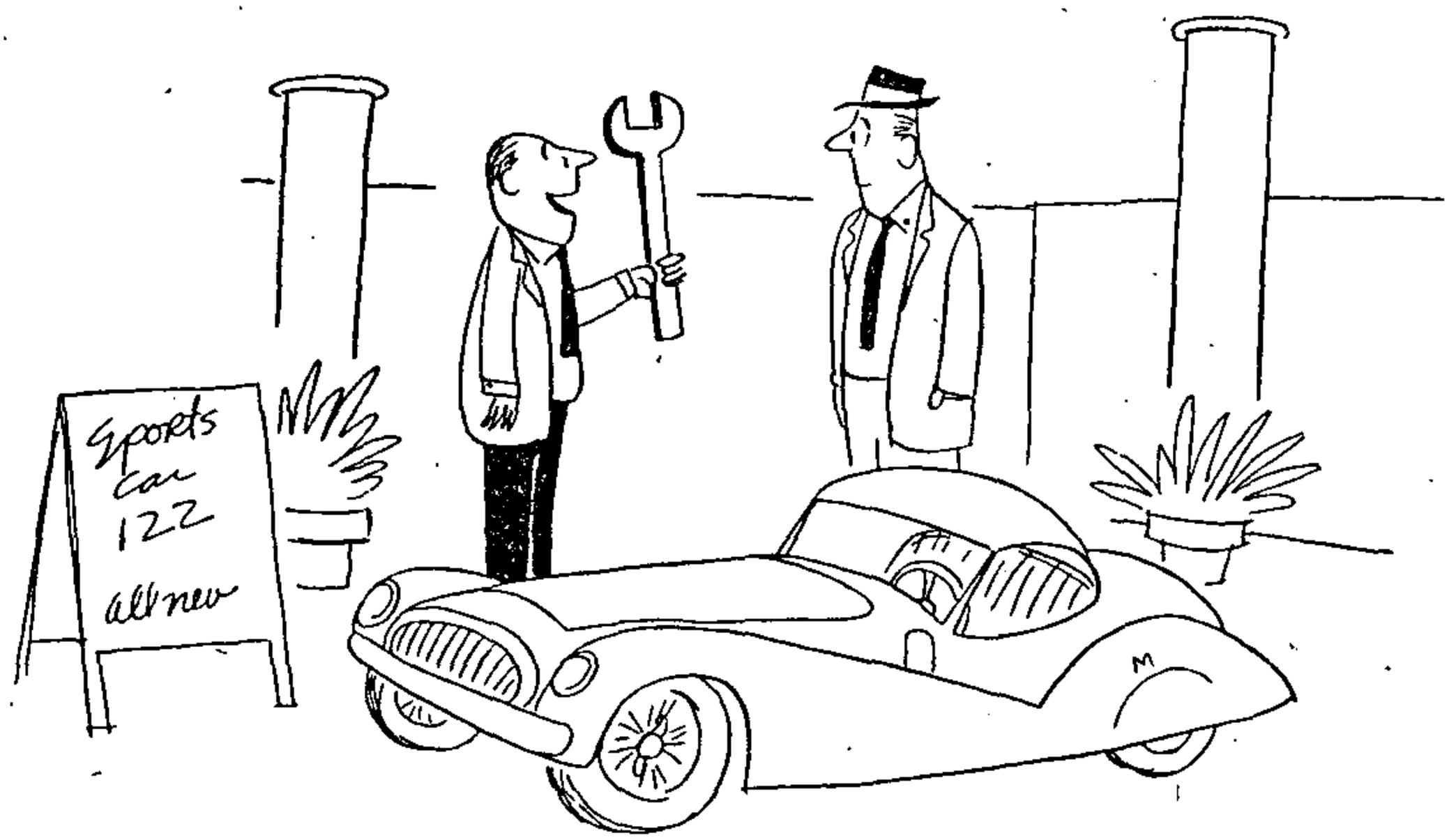

". . . And this accessory is in case someone makes cute comments."

Was he, perhaps, eaten by a lion?

ANNIVERSARY

BY STEPHEN BARR

THE two old gentlemen—they were not related, but they looked very alike—raised their cut-glass goblets in a toast. "To the tenth of August!" said one—he was perhaps slightly the older. "And to you, my dear Charles!"

"Forty years!" said the other. "It has been a good life, my dear Jeremy." He looked around the little room, at the oak sideboard, at the Adam fireplace with the oval framed portrait over it, at the toile de Jouy curtains through which one saw the rosebushes and the mulberry tree.

"That was a worthy dinner, Jeremy," went on the younger—but he could not have been less than seventy-five. "There is not a chef, I venture to say, who is your equal with a woodcock!"

The other blushed at the compliment—as he always did. "But the salad dressing, Charles!" he said. He never neglected to praise the salad dressing—it was Charles' one ineffable skill. "No one but you has the touch, and how beautiful the table looks!"

"Thank you, Jeremy. I polished the silver again this morning, whilst you were at market. I think we shall have to get the girl in this week. I am not up to the heavy cleaning any more." He sighed. "But I dread the intrusion."

"Ah, yes, Charles. We suit each other. We do not want anyone upsetting things in our little nest. Do you remember that dreadful cook? And her notion of a cream sauce?"

"Quite dreadful. I remember I was afraid to give her notice—I had to leave it to you."

Jeremy nodded and pushed across the decanter. "A little more port, Charles? But that time when they were going to widen the road and cut off part of our little garden—you were the one who faced up to the commissioner."

" It was either that, Jeremy, or lose our mulberry tree. We have managed to keep things exactly the way we want them in spite of a changing world. I expect we are the only house in the village that still lights by oil and candle. And that horrible wireless! Frankly, I should be afraid to touch it! "

" I only stopped to listen to a wireless once," Jeremy said, " when I went to the wine merchant's. I wish them joy of it."

" You know," Charles said, taking a morsel of Stilton, " it reminds me of how, when I had not come to know you, I was afraid you would grow weary of living in the country—so far from the diversions and entertainments of London. I was afraid you would miss going to the theatre."

" I despise the theatre, my dear Charles."

" Ah, but I did not know that then, my dear Jeremy. I lived in dread of the day when you would leave. I knew you well enough to recognise a conformity of tastes in other respects. Why, even in books—and by the by, whose turn is it tonight? "

" Yours, I believe. You have a fine reading voice, Charles. Let me see, now. We finished *The Newcomes* last night."

" What do you say to *Cranford*? We have not had that recently."

" Capital, Charles, capital! I never tire of it."

" Good. Come to think of it though, *I* was reading last night, was I not? "

" No, indeed, my dear fellow. I remember distinctly that I had to move my chair—I was too far away from the lamp."

" But surely, Jeremy, that was the night before? "

" Perhaps you are right. It is no moment. I shall be honoured to read."

" You are always so tactful, Jeremy. I think it was your tact that endeared you to me, even more than our agreement in everything. Why, even in the matter of a soft-boiled egg—two and three-quarters of a minute! "

" To the dot, Charles, to the dot. And in wine—a sound port, or a well-rounded burgundy. Faugh to white wines! Except—"

" Except hock," said Charles. " Hock—well iced—with turbot. When do we have turbot again, Jeremy? "

" The fishmonger said he expected some in tomorrow, Charles. I must remember to put a bottle of the Berncasteler on ice. Shall we read now? "

Charles nodded with a smile and picked up the decanter and glasses. They rose and went into the study. Jeremy lighted the lamp, and looked at the easy chair, shaking his head. Charles went to the shelves and came back with an old book, bound in Russia leather.

" You know," Jeremy said, almost as if to himself, " I could have sworn it was last night you moved the chair . . ."

" Perhaps it was, my dear fellow, perhaps it was. But I shall read with the utmost pleasure."

" Ah, Charles, you pamper me! "

" We pamper one another, Jeremy." Charles sat in the easy chair and opened the book. Then he laid it down on his knees and took off his steel-rimmed spectacles. " Forty years . . ." he said again, and his eyes went to a gold-framed photograph on the mantelpiece. It was of a youngish man in Edwardian clothes. He bore a faint resemblance to Charles, but he had a more dashing air. " Just to think," Charles went on, " I was sitting in this very chair—on the Day! "

Jeremy smiled. " So you were," he said. " So you were; and I stood here." He went to the fireplace and turned. " I shall never forget how surprised you looked! " He began to laugh and Charles joined in. " I remember when I showed you the letter," Jeremy went on, " you said, ' Bless my soul! I thought I had burnt it! ' "

They both laughed heartily at the recollection.

" Ah, had I but known! " Charles said, wiping his eyes. " If some presentiment had told me of the happy outcome of that careless omission! Why, my first emotion was one of self-reproach! But you were so tactful, Jeremy."

" I'm glad to think that, Charles."

Both old gentlemen glanced up at the framed photograph, and Jeremy shook his head. " I often wonder how he fared," he said, " in the primeval forest . . . I should not care, myself, for Africa."

" And he," replied Charles, " could never abide England. Bertram had always been the adventurous sort. We were not unfair to him, were we, Jeremy? "

" Not a bit of it. He would have been restless in this place. It might have been made for *us*, though." Jeremy winked at Charles, and Charles winked back. " Besides, what Bertram does not know cannot hurt him, can it? "

" No, Jeremy. And when Cousin John bequeathed this place to Bertram, he did not know how unsuitable the choice was! He did not realise that the younger brother—myself, in fact—was the right man to enjoy and relish this little property. If Bertram had assumed ownership he would have sold it up and taken the money to Monte Carlo and lost it! And then gone to Africa! I think what we have done, Jeremy, has been a moral act. I truly think so."

Jeremy nodded in emphatic agreement. " But I must admit," he said, " that I was not quite sure what you would do when I

showed you the letter. I found it in a copy of Horace that you had been reading in bed, you know."

"Very careless of me, Jeremy. But at that time I did not realise you were such a great reader."

"I used to take books from this room into the kitchen, Charles," the older one said. "It would not have been correct to ask you . . ."

"Tact," said the younger. "Always your strong point, Jeremy. Indeed, when you showed me the letter I could not imagine at first what you were driving at. How did you put it?"

"Why, I believe I said, 'I found this, sir, and I took the liberty of reading it. I am happy at the news that your brother was not, as everyone thinks, eaten by a lion.'"

"Were you calling me 'sir' in those days?"

"Oh, yes. I continued to for nearly a year afterwards."

"Ah, Jeremy, what sensitiveness! What a delicacy of feeling! Then what did *I* say?"

"You said, 'Thank you very much, Jeremy. That will be all.'"

"Ah, yes. And then you said, 'Not quite, Charles—'"

"'Not quite, sir.'"

"Of course. 'Not quite, sir. I was wondering if I might move my things to the guest room—the servants' quarters are a bit draughty, sir.' Tell me, Jeremy, how did I look when you said that?"

"You blinked, Charles."

"Come now, my dear fellow, I never blink."

"You did then. Finally you said, 'Why should I let you?' and I said, 'Well, sir, I should like to occupy the guest room, and you would like to continue to occupy the master's bedroom—but will that be possible if Master Bertram is informed of the bequest?'"

"So you did, so you did. Ah, me, I was a little indignant at first was I not? I said, 'And am I supposed to take up your duties as well as give up the guest room?' And you said, 'Well, I should not dream of your doing the cooking, sir. I shall never allow anyone but myself to cook for us.'" Charles wagged his head with satisfaction. "And a good thing, too. I admired your straightforwardness, Jeremy."

"But I'm afraid you were not pleased, my dear Charles."

"That came later—when I had time to think things over. At first, I tried to contrive some way of getting around you; but it would have meant your leaving me, and I soon came to realise I did not want that. In fact, with the change in your status here, you became more truly a companion, Jeremy. A boon companion

—and your wonderful cooking! Savarin himself could not outcook my friend Jeremy! "

The older man blushed again. " But there is also an art in setting a table," he said. " And you would win accolades for your beautiful flower arrangements! This little house is like a jewel—under your care. And you know where everything is."

Charles smiled—and in his eye was a minute spark, a tiny, secret glint. He paused for a moment, and said, " And how fine it was of you to come right out with the suggestion that we read aloud to one another—there is nothing I look forward to more! What do you say, since this is the Anniversary, to a drop of the Jubilee brandy, eh? "

" Capital, Charles! I shall fetch it directly."

" No, no, my dear fellow, allow *me* to. I insist! "

The slightly younger—was he perhaps only seventy-four?—got up, and in a few moments returned with a crusted bottle and two pear-shaped glasses. They toasted one another and Charles said, " We have talked so long it is getting a little late. I am tired, my old friend — what do you say we forgo the reading for tonight? "

" My very sentiments, dear Charles. I, too, am tired. So, good night to you, Charles."

" Good night—we shall read tomorrow."

Jeremy blew out the lamp and they went upstairs—each to his cosy bedroom.

When Charles had closed his door he stood for a moment in thought. You are right, old friend—he said to himself—you are indeed right: I know where everything is in this house.

He went to the wall where another photograph of his elder brother hung. This one was a sepia print and it showed Bertram in hunting costume, with a Transvaal hat turned up at the side, and an elephant rifle in his hand.

Charles stood looking at it for a moment. Odd of me—he said to himself—how I cannot bear to throw away mementoes!

He took it down and opened the back. Lying disclosed before him was a yellowed clipping from a Bloemfontein newspaper, dated thirty-eight years before. It told of the unfortunate death of the Englishman who, two years earlier, had escaped from a lion and now had succumbed to a rare tropical fever.

" This you must never see, my dear Jeremy," said Charles in a whisper. " Whatever would have happened to us if you had learnt that your blackmail was unfounded? Whatever would have happened to *me*? "

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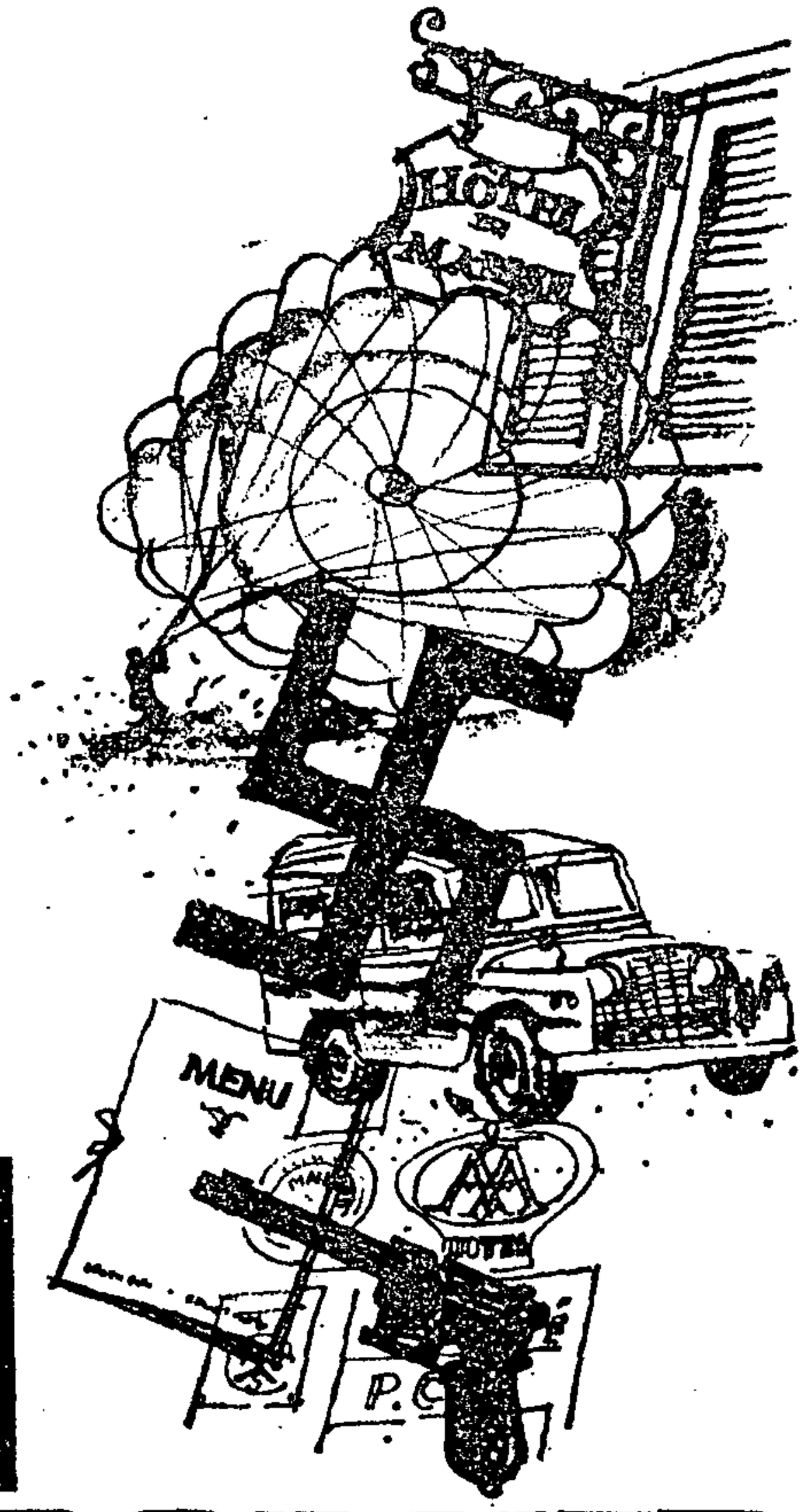

MAN IN A CORNER

MARGARET BONHAM

THAT morning I had a letter from Etienne. His purple continental handwriting was visible from halfway downstairs and across the hall. Though he is a national celebrity, Etienne never uses a typewriter. (" For cooking, you understand, one must have the touch; this banging on the fingers, one loses it.") Nor does he use a secretary, except for routine matters. His investigations are carried out in an atmosphere of deadly secrecy worthy of the Maquis, which was indeed where I had first met him. Twenty years ago we sat in a loft over a cowshed which smelled as if it hadn't been mucked out for weeks, and talked under our breaths about truffles and vintages and wild duck à la presse, with one ear open for the sound of German trucks. He said, " Even for a Frenchman, you understand food."

" I am only half French."

" The other half—that is still more surprising. After this dirty war is over I think I will go and live in England."

" Would you like it, I wonder? "

" *Like*—that does not matter. In England there is not such competition. I shall teach the English to eat."

" You've got something there."

" And you will help me."

" I might. Just now I could even eat a—"

" *Listen.*"

They were German trucks, and they were coming closer.

I didn't see Etienne again till 1953, when I got a letter addressed in that familiar, oblique, violet handwriting. It was written proudly, in laboured English. He had traced me through the War Office. After three years in England he had worked his way up to the top rank of hotel chefs; now, as he put it, " I am going to places. I have ideas."

Ten years before, in the loft over the cowshed, I had known Etienne was indeed " going to places " if he survived; he had that sort of determination. We had dinner together once or twice when I was in London, and corresponded, but I was busy taking care of my estate and we didn't see much of each other.

Soon he was on television, looking like a surgeon and talking with that entrancing accent, and beating bits of chicken insensible and cooking them on a red-hot grill under all those lights, without sweating. Plainly he had that odd, incalculable means of contact between screen and viewers that meant he was going to be a success. He was. His next idea was to start a culinary guidebook that he hoped to make into a British version of the *Guide Michelin*. He was already writing articles for glossy magazines and the more

sophisticated papers; now he began to recommend places where the food was good. Being instantly recognisable to anyone who watched television, he could not inspect them himself. He collected a band of observers whose judgment he could trust and sent them to report on eating places that turned up in their parts of the country. I became one of them. I had no wife or family, my appearance was inconspicuous, my occupation as a landowner gave me some leisure, and though I was comfortably off I had no objection to admirable meals at Etienne's expense; after all, he must have been more comfortably off still.

This latest letter, then, clearly bore such an assignment, since he had written it himself. Etienne took no chances with secretaries, who might be willing for a consideration to tip off hotelkeepers. It was scribbled on almost transparent paper and suggested that I could do worse than try out the King's Arms at Hamptonford, of which he quite often had glowing reports from gastronomically-minded members of the general public.

So, as a prosperous gentleman farmer, ex-Maquisard (but no one would have guessed it), half-French (but no one would have guessed that, either), I drove through the Cotswolds, which were looking their best, with blue cloud shadows on the bare hills, and groves of beeches reddening with spring buds, and the sun drawing colour from the worn-silver stone in the villages. Hamptonford is a small, picture-postcard town, addled by tourists in the summer, but that day quiet and beautiful. Being local born and bred, I'd been there often, but not often enough to be well known, and anyway the King's Arms had recently changed hands; I remembered it as dark and full of unexercised spaniels, stuffed otters and the smell of Brussels sprouts.

They hadn't fortunately, given more than a spruced-up appearance to the outside, which is one of the gems of seventeenth-century Cotswold architecture. I approached the door, observing almost automatically Etienne's rules for his secret agents. Is the menu displayed outside the entrance? It was. Is it the same as the one offered in the dining-room? I memorised it rapidly; it made delectable reading and I felt hungrier than ever.

I went into the dining-room. It was small and warm, with rich red curtains and enough space between the tables. The waiter put me in a corner. I unfolded my napkin in pleasurable anticipation, and then I looked around and in the opposite corner I saw Wessler.

The more I told myself it couldn't be Wessler, the more I was convinced it was. He paid no attention to me. There was no reason he should. The last time he'd seen me I'd been a French peasant; not quite the village idiot, but near enough. I could be

trusted with cows, I had a gift for cows. "Apart from that, well—" and they all tapped their foreheads.

My mother was French and my father English, and I was brought up bilingual. When France fell I was messing about in the army in a squalid part of Lincolnshire, teaching morons to take guns to pieces and put them together again, and wishing some earth tremor would fold up the landscape and produce a hill or two; but I had an uneasy feeling that sooner or later the army would catch on to the idea that though lots of people could teach morons about guns not so many could speak faultless French. I was right.

They dropped me in central France, on a cold night, after a period of intensive and agonising training. I floated down as Capt. Martin Fleming, B.A. Oxon., and landed as Pierre, sent to relatives in the village of Marise by my mother in Clermont-Ferrand because her arthritis made it difficult for her to take care of me, and I would be useful with the cows on the farm. The last part, at least, was true. My papers, though false, were in order, and my identity had been so hammered into me that sometimes, sitting in a corner of a field and watching seven cows monotonously eating wet grass, I alarmed myself by really *feeling* like Pierre.

Germans were billeted in the village; I had to be Pierre a great deal of the time, except when I was out with the Maquis or safely shut in the farmhouse where I lived with the Meuniers and their daughter Nicole and their son André; and even then Pierre took over, almost without my knowing it, at a step outside or a knock on the door or a rustle in the bushes. It was a good act for fooling Germans. I think I can say without boasting that as a peasant-class mental defective I was entirely convincing; I even learnt to drool. When I wasn't drooling I got together with the Maquis on some useful activity. Apart from making life as difficult as possible for the Germans, we transmitted to London; we got two parachute consignments of arms and supplies safely hidden; we blew up bridges and bits of railway and one freight train, and though we had some close shaves we lost only two men. Also, I married.

I was twenty-four and Nicole three years younger. Between her and André, who was thirteen, there had been three brothers: only one was still alive, a prisoner in Germany. Nicole had black hair that her mother cut untidily, and light-brown eyes, and courage. We used to meet in the dark orchard. I asked her parents, formally. We were married in the farm kitchen by the priest, who could be trusted.

Like Etienne, she said, "After this is over—"

"After this is over we go to England."

" That will be nice."

" Safe, anyway."

" Safe," she said, her breath warm against my cheek. Even that night, perhaps the night my child was conceived, we listened with a detached part of ourselves for the footsteps and for the knock on the door. Pierre was like a coat, a dressing-gown, that I kept beside the bed.

Soon afterwards I met Etienne. He was in charge of a large area, communications were so-so, and he came on a disintegrating bicycle to look us over. (Years later, in London, I asked him whether he'd been impressed. " Some were better," he said guardedly. " Some were infinitely worse.") His appearance, when I first saw him, was exceedingly scruffy, and he smelt; so did I, and so did the cowshed over which we sat and talked, not only about truffles and burgundy but about plans. Etienne's plans were those of a gambler and terrified me, but they were worked out in great detail and somehow they came off. He said, " Don't worry so much. The Boches here are all stupid. Except Wessler; you must watch him, that one."

" I know."

" He is dangerous. Not stupid at all."

Till now I have not written of Wessler as I knew him then. Now I must bring him into the story. During the almost twenty years or so before I saw him again at the King's Arms I could at any moment shut my eyes and summon up his face, as clearly as though he were present. In a Teutonic way he was good-looking: a hard square jaw, high cheekbones, light-blue eyes, blond hair thick and straight—there could never have been any doubt about his Aryan descent. His left temple bore a diagonal scar. He was a splendid sight in uniform, and he knew it. At that time he must have been about thirty. As an officer he was more than efficient; his men, whether or not Etienne was right about their I.Q.'s, were rigidly disciplined. His French was good, his manners were correct, and all the village hated him.

ONE gusty and moonless night in May, a German corporal was found dead beside the river with three knife wounds in his back. Wessler handled the matter with his usual competence. He picked out ten hostages, lined them up, and had them shot in the cobbled square in front of the church. One of them was the boy André. Another was my wife, who was two months pregnant

The rest of the inhabitants were ordered out to watch. André cried a little, but my wife died standing straight and tearless, without once looking in my direction, for fear her glance would give me away.

Killing Wessler in the heat of the moment would have been worse than useless; every train and bridge that we blew up brought nearer the day when it would be possible to kill him without the danger of reprisal. We knew the invasion was coming soon. Unfortunately for me, fortunately for Wessler, when the proper time for reckoning did arrive I was in hospital with only one kneecap instead of two, and in no shape to do anything about him.

Distance rather than time is perhaps the healer; when I caught sight of Wessler across the dining-room I felt a hatred as pure and primitive and satisfying as if twenty years had been a day. In that first moment the possibility of mistake never crossed my mind; I had slept or lain awake too often with that face printed on my eyelids. Time had not greatly changed him. He had good bone structure and the kind of build that does not run to fat. The blond hair was less close-cut, and receding a little over the temples, but not greying. The scar had faded from red to white, but you could still see it. The affluent businessman, in an expensive dark suit, engrossed in stuffing himself with roast duckling in an expensive hotel, was transparent as a ghost; through him I looked at Wessler, standing in the sunlight by the church and giving the order that killed my wife, her brother and my child.

I finished my meal quickly, paid the bill and sat over coffee watching him furtively. If he was staying in the hotel, so would I; but I didn't think he looked like a resident. It turned out that he wasn't. I discreetly followed him outside. His car was new and fairly expensive but of a make noted for comfort rather than speed, and in colour an inconspicuous grey. Its registration number, which instantly burnt itself into my memory, was local. He got in and started off, and I tagged along behind. We drove north.

While I pursued him, discretion pursued me. Though I was terrified of losing him, I dared not keep too close. On the open stretches, where I could follow at a tactful distance, I had time to reflect.

Reflection brought with it the first pricks of doubt. People can have doubles. I myself was once set on by a total stranger, female, sixtyish and perfectly sober, in a hotel at Southampton, who recognised me instantly as the member of Parliament for Callingham West and went into a long howl of grievance about her rent. I have never met the member for Callingham West, but I am

prepared to believe he looks like me. An inoffensive Englishman could look like Wessler, even to the scar on the temple.

Perhaps it was the French half of me, and my passion for France, that over-rode the English-gentleman half and started me following Wessler. In that belief I made half-hearted excuses for myself, as I tailed him into sterner country under cloudy skies, past the boundary, both architectural and phonetic, that divides the North of England from the South. Soon it began to rain. In the towns I kept close up behind, for fear I should miss him if he turned into a hotel yard or off to a factory, or parked among other cars; but I could see no indication that he knew he was pursued—he did not keep glancing in his rear-view mirror, or increase his speed, or slow down and wave me on. He didn't stop for tea either. It was in a grey early dusk, wet and chilly, that we pulled up in a smallish town.

Wessler drove into a parking space at the rear of the hotel. I left my car a little way up the street. An investigation of the clutter behind me produced a cap, an old mackintosh and a pair of rubber boots. I put these on, thanking heaven that the weather justified them. As a further disguise I added my horn-rimmed reading glasses and pulled a bit of my hair down toward one eyebrow.

I went through the entrance and into a large hall, lavishly furnished but some way past its Edwardian best.

In the far corner there was a door marked PUBLIC BAR. This bar proved to be L-shaped and not very big, and connected with the hotel bar by a space for serving and a kind of shutter, now open, through which I could see another door marked DINING ROOM. For my purposes it could hardly have been better designed.

I was now a near-sighted and not very prosperous farmer, and almost without realising it I had taken out a handkerchief and was polishing imaginary raindrops off my spectacles when the barman appeared. He was square in shape, with ears like jug handles, and seemed friendly. I ordered—for one must suffer in the cause of art—a pint of bitter.

" Nasty night," he said.

" It is that," I said in a Yorkshire accent. One can't be too careful; or was I actually enjoying myself, being nostalgic, playing the secret agent again?

In five minutes someone came downstairs, and was greeted with " Hullo, Bill, old boy," by the customers, and with " Evening, Mr. Wilson," by the barman. The replies, as far as I could distinguish them, were in impeccable English. Mr. Wilson accepted a scotch but stayed maddeningly just out of my sight.

I picked up the *West Midlands Courier*. By tearing a hole in the back page and leaning my right elbow half across the bar and nearly dislocating my neck, I managed to bring into view a profile I could never forget. " I say, Bill," someone called, and he turned his head. That was good enough, I thought. I left my half-finished beer and went out to the hall.

I was lucky again; no one was about. In the visitors' book the last registration was " W. Wilson, Madderfield, Glos." It was not a continental hand; the writing was firm, black and upright, unlike Wessler's, whose signature I had seen posted in the village square in Marise when I was loafing around being Pierre. Under " Nationality " was written " British." Wilhelm Wessler—William Wilson. People who changed their names, it's said, often keep the same initials. Madderfield is a sizeable village twelve miles southwest of where I live. It would be easy enough to find him there. Thanking Providence he hadn't changed himself into J. Smith of Bristol, I went back to the bar and my beer, and stood with ears pricked, staring at an account in the paper of some local activity, probably football.

After ten or fifteen minutes he took his leave of the others and went into the dining-room, passing across my line of vision, waving negligently to cries of " So long, Bill, be seeing you." The rest of the party, I gathered were local; they began to drift away to their homes. I swallowed the rest of my beer and with the greatest reluctance ordered the same again. Perfection in all things, Fleming, I told myself. When the barman brought it I said—remembering I was Yorkshire but not laying it on too thick in case he asked which part—" That gentleman as just went into dining-room—is his name Morris? "

" One-and-ten," he said. " Ta. What, him? No, that's Mr. Wilson. Comes up every Wednesday. Got a factory down Gloucester way, but they've started another one here. Doing all right, they say. Plastics, or summat."

Overwhelmed by all this generously offered information, I got down about a quarter of a pint rapidly, before saying, " Spit image of a chap I used to work for. In Birmingham. Morris he was, though."

"Ar," he said. " Well, they say all of us has got a double, somewhere."

I said, " That's right."

" You're from Yorkshire, though, aren't you? "

I said "Ay." I could see his next question shaping itself, so I said hastily, "And better be getting back there, or the missis'll be taking on."

Driving home through the rain and darkness, I planned my campaign. There was time and to spare for planning. Wilson was now in the bag. I only needed proof that he was Wessler. Without proof that satisfied me beyond all doubt, I couldn't kill him.

Next morning I had breakfast and dealt with some letters and talked to my overseer; nothing urgently needed my presence. I worked out my method of approach to Wessler. It was the essence of simplicity, and there were few risks in it. I put on corduroys and a tweed jacket, and took with me a pipe; I rarely smoke, but I have noticed that a pipe gives one an air of being a sound chap. Of the three vehicles available, the Land-Rover seemed the most suitable. I collected some props I had prepared and drove to Madderfield, humming tunelessly. It was like the Maquis again. I felt rather good.

I visited, as rapidly as possible, the two largest houses in the village, and then, having established my *bona fides*, I repaired to the George and Dragon.

I introduced myself to the landlord, who was youngish and fresh-faced. " We're organising a fête next month to help the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. I wonder if you'd mind putting up a small poster? "

" With pleasure," he said.

I produced the small poster. "And we're trying to get a few people to help with prizes, or something for the stalls. It's a bit out of your area, I know, but it's a good cause. I've been to the Lodge and the Manor—is there anyone else might be worth a visit, do you think? " I produced my notebook, feeling a slight glow of virtue from doing some extra work—even though I did it with ulterior motives.

" Let's see," he said. " I'll give you a bottle of port or sherry, to start with."

" That's very kind of you."

" There's Colonel Lewis at *Greengates*. He's pretty good about charity."

" Lewis. I'll try him. Somebody gave me a name—where is it? Yes, Wilson. Any hope there? "

" *Thatchers*? I don't know them well, but they'd be worth trying."

" Would that be the Wilson I bought some pigs from, a few years back? Or it might have been Mason—can't remember names. Tall, dark chap with about ten children."

" Not this Wilson, it wouldn't be. No family and no pigs—he's a businessman, plastics or something. His wife's an artist."

" Oh? Any good? "

"Couldn't tell you, but she might give you a couple of pictures to raffle off. He's pretty reliable for local subscriptions and things. I'd have a go."

Thatchers was two minutes away. I drew up outside the Wilson-Wessler residence and got out of the car, knocking out my pipe on my expensive brogues, and looking, I thought, convincingly squirish and admittable. The house, as its name implied, was thatched. It was a converted seventeenth-century farmhouse, and not bad of its kind. Everything was well groomed —close-cut lawns, daffodils under almond trees, and all that. I speculated that the wife's paintings would be of delphiniums in jugs, or, at best, chianti bottles with apples. Clasping posters and notebooks to my respectable tweed, I seized some badly tortured wrought-iron and knocked.

The maid, and the sitting-room, confirmed my impression that Herr Wessler—if that was who he was—had been doing well for himself. Mrs. Wilson came in almost at once—in fact, she looked very nice indeed. One way and another, Wessler certainly was on to a good thing. By now he must have been about forty-seven or so, and she was thirty at the most—small, reed-like, pale, with dark hair short and almost straight, and large, black-lashed grey eyes, and a wide red mouth. Something about the contours of her face reminded me of Nicole. She wore a plain dress of thin grey tweed and a quantity of smoky pearls, an outfit which, though exceedingly becoming, suggested to me that she wasn't much in with life in the village, most wives of her presumed status being probably at this time of the morning still in the jersey-and-old-skirt stage. But possibly, I thought, wishing to be fair, she is lunching in Cheltenham or something.

Mrs. Wilson showed a benign interest when I explained about the fête and promised to give some things for a stall. When she offered cigarettes, I asked permission to light my pipe; almost without realising it, I was emphasising my Englishness and the fact that I was a landowner, competing, perhaps, with Wessler, who was German (but did she know that?) and a businessman. It crossed my mind that, though I was at least five years younger than he, I had less hair and more stomach and could do with all the charm I could produce.

"Someone told me you paint," I said.

I was expecting some reply like "Well, I dab around in water-colours, you know, but I'm really no good," but she answered serenely, "Yes."

Taken aback, I said, "What sort of things?"

"Things like those," she said, indicating the wall above the fireplace and the wall opposite the windows.

I'd had time for a rapid look at "those" while I was assessing the room in the few moments before she'd appeared. The look had had to be so rapid that the assessment had got no further than "Taste in art surprisingly good." I had assumed they were reproductions; now that I could inspect them more closely, I saw they were originals, signed "A. Lang." Sharp and thorny and drab in colour and semi-abstract, they made an immediate and exciting impact. I said, "You did those?"

"I was Lang before I married."

"What is A. for?"

"Aurelia. Fancy, but it's on my birth certificate." Not asking whether I liked them or not, she sat calmly smoking. The grey dress was short, and revealed an admirable pair of legs.

I said, "I don't go to London often—one gets out of touch. But surely you must be a professional."

"I was," she said. "I had a few shows. I still paint when I can, but I got out of touch too, down here."

Meaning Wessler thinks a wife is for the bed, the kitchen and the cocktail party, I thought violently, sucking at my pipe, which produced a noise like a sewer but no smoke. I was framing a question which would sound discreet without being so discreet as to be useless, when she looked at her watch and said, "I'm terribly sorry, but I'm afraid I must go. I've got to be in Cheltenham by a quarter to one."

I cursed inwardly and got up. At the door she said, "I'll let you have something for the fête. Shall I post it?"

"Please don't bother. I've got some other things to collect—I'll come over, or send someone, if that's all right."

"Of course," she said. "Forgive me for having to rush off. Good-bye."

To appease my conscience, I called on Colonel Lewis. He was, thank heavens, out.

I drove home and brooded for a week, and tried some self-analysis, without coming to any conclusions that appealed to me much. There was a lot of work piling up on the estate, and I found myself doing it absent-mindedly and defending myself from the overseer's raised eyebrows with an apologetic snort and a rash reference to sinus trouble.

Then it was Wednesday—the day Wessler made his weekly visit to his new factory in the north.

I returned to the house at noon, had lunch and telephoned his home number at Madderfield.

She answered the telephone herself; she said yes, she would help with costumes for the fête if I thought she'd be any use, and yes, she would have dinner with me, and yes, she'd be ready by seven or a little later. I rang off and took several deep breaths and gave the dogs a long walk.

One can't go out to dinner in a Land-Rover, so I took the Austin. She was ready when I arrived. She wore a plain, high-necked black dress and a loose coat of some silky grey-green stuff, and no jewellery at all. I declined her invitation to come in for a drink, on the pretext that I'd booked a table for eight o'clock.

On the way we discussed costumes for a dreary play the village schoolchildren were to do at the fête, about some local skirmish in the Civil War (we'd had to bribe the Roundheads because they all wanted to be Cavaliers). That got us to Gloucester, and I felt I'd done my duty as a member of the committee. The river meadows were bright under the moon and the cathedral towered like a great cat with pricked ears. Mario's was warm and decorative, and Mario himself, after greeting me effusively, restrained himself with an obvious effort from kissing my companion's hand and led us to a secluded table lit by three candles and surrounded by a lot of peasant straw-work and wickerwork and pottery and all that. I'd told him on the telephone not to hurry over the service; the droop of his eyelids, as he helped the signora to her place, expressed an enthralled complicity. She said, " I've never been here. How nice and unexpected."

" I hope you like Italian food."

" I adore it."

A sign to the waiter produced a service trolley. Mario served the first course with some flourishes and mannerisms that made me suspect he'd been watching Etienne on television. When he left us I said, " Does your husband mind your coming out with me? "

" I doubt if he'd be enthusiastic," she said, " but I haven't had a chance to ask him. He's away on Wednesdays. He has to go up north."

I said, " Oh. What for? "

She gave me a succinct account of the plastics industry. The wine arrived—a fine Montrachet—and I let the subject drop for a bit.

"Are you married? " she asked.

" I'm a widower, " I said.

" I'm sorry."

" It was a long time ago. She—she was killed in the war.

" You must have been very young," she said. "And no children? "

I looked at her across the table in the candlelight, and she was beautiful and compassionate. I saw myself, in a depressing instant, as though a shutter had opened and closed again, leaning over a gate with my son or daughter beside me, watching a pony or counting lambs. She was a beautiful and compassionate stranger, but I was taking her out for a different reason. I said brusquely, " No. Have you? "

" We wanted them," she said. " We've been married seven years. I've had every kind of test, but it doesn't seem to work." It wouldn't occur to the Master Race, I thought viciously, that he and not she might be responsible. " It takes two to make a child," I said. (But only one to kill it.)

" Yes," she said. " They couldn't find any reason why I shouldn't conceive. It may be on his side." She spoke directly and without embarrassment.

In this moment of confidence, I pressed on. " You don't seem like an industrial expert's wife."

" No. I suppose it was a rebound. I wanted children, and security—I'd had a rather dire time with someone so different . . ." Not exactly withdrawing, but looking as if she wanted to change the subject, she said, " What did you do in the war? "

" Nothing interesting. I got one in the leg early on and they fixed it up more or less, and then I sat behind a desk and told other people to go off and get cracking. A lot of them died. As a job I didn't like it. And what did your husband do? "

" In the war? He worked with the Maquis."

This piece of effrontery on Wessler's part nearly made me give myself away.. It was plain she didn't know of his change of nationality, and so it was unlikely I could get any proof of his identity from her. But I went on trying. I said, " Which part of France? "

" I don't know," she said. " He doesn't talk about it much. I think he had a bad time. He was a prisoner of war in Germany."

Poor Wilhelm Wessler, I said to myself, filling up her glass. How he must have suffered. Or was it poor Bill Wilson?

She said, " When he has nightmares he talks in his sleep."

The effort to appear casual brought me out in a cold sweat. " What does he talk about? " I said.

" Often it's in German. He went to a German university before the war. And about someone called Marise. I don't know who she

was. I've never asked him. It may seem strange to you, but my husband and I never talked much about our lives before we met."

I could have told her about Marise. Marise could have been a girl, but wasn't. Marise was the name of the village where I was Pierre and her husband shot my wife and my brother-in-law and my unborn child.

IN the morning I telephoned Etienne. Getting on to Etienne was a major operation. I eventually ran him to earth in the studio of a fashionable photographer, who had no doubt just got him nicely posed and was spitting with rage in the background. We spoke French. I said, " Something rather important has happened. Could I see you in private? "

" What is this mystery, then? Anyway, you can come to London? "

" When and where? "

" Tomorrow morning, at my flat. Eleven o'clock? I have a Marsala you must try. Have you visited the King's Arms for me?"

" Yes."

" It's good, or not? "

" I'll tell you tomorrow."

" More and more mysterious," Etienne said, and rang off.

It takes about three hours to get to London from my house. I started early and arrived before ten.

Etienne was writing one of his underground letters, in purple ink on tissue paper; he was surrounded by *avant-garde* Victoriana: S-shaped sofas, crimson plush, bead fringes, flowers of wax and shells and feathers under a glass dome. He said, " What is this, then? I am all impatience. But first, the Marsala."

I complimented him on the Marsala, which was indeed excellent. After we had discussed its finer points, I said, " Do you remember Wessler? "

" In Marise? That German son of a pig? Naturally I remember him. Why? "

" I went to the King's Arms and he was lunching there."

Etienne put down his glass, groped in his pocket and brought out a beaten-up pack of Gauloises.

I hadn't had one for years. The smell and the taste took me right back to France, as if it had been yesterday I'd sat with him in the loft over the cowshed. He said, " You are joking, no? "

" I wouldn't drive all this way to joke."

" But it's impossible."

I told him the whole story.

" Then it must be possible," he said. " What are you going to do? "

"Ask your advice. What would you do in my place? "

" Me, I would have the temptation to dispose of him. But very carefully—one must not hang for a swine like that."

"As it happens, I have the opportunity to stage something of the kind." I told him a few things I had learnt from Mrs. Wilson, over coffee and Cointreau, two nights before. " On Saturday he's taking a week's holiday. Fishing, by himself. He stays in a small pub in Wales, on a tributary of the Wye. It's a part of the country I know like the back of my hand."

" He might, you mean, with a little assistance, slip on a rock? "

" Too risky. He's at least as strong as I am, and probably stronger. Besides, I want him to know. And once he's seen me, once he's been told, there mustn't be any mistake."

" Yes, you are right. One moment." Etienne uncoiled himself; he is not a tall man and he must be in his middle fifties, but he still moves as if he had a backbone like a snake's. Twenty years ago none of us, young as we were, could wriggle through mud or brushwood, flat on our bellies, as deftly and silently as he could. He went into the next room and returned in a few moments with a French 7.65 service automatic and a box of ammunition.

" It won't be traced," he said. " Wessler, or anyone, could have picked it up. It was Gaston's. You didn't know him—it was before they dropped you into France. The Boche shot him too; that same Boche. He was seventeen and my nephew, and I kept his gun. This is what one would call poetic justice."

It was a good weapon, properly looked after. Etienne had always been as meticulous about weapons as about cooking.

" I give it to you with Gaston's best wishes. And don't miss."

" If it is to look like suicide, I can hardly miss. It will have to be close."

"And by then he will know, and he is dangerous."

" Yes."

" How he comes to be here, this is what I don't understand. Marrying well, making money, speaking English like an Englishman. He was efficient, one must give him that. And Frau Wessler," Etienne said amiably, refilling my glass, "—or should one say Mrs. Wilson—she is attractive, no? "

" Very attractive."

" So much the better."

" I don't think it's so much the better. I think it's so much the worse. Sometimes I wonder about my motives."

" What were his motives when he killed your wife? "

" Yes, well," I said. "At least he has no children."

"And thanks to him, neither have you. Mother of God," Etienne said, " what has happened to you? Wessler is Wessler, after twenty years or fifty or a hundred. Murdering pregnant women and boys of thirteen is not less wrong because time has passed."

" I suppose I came here to hear you say that."

" Well, I have said it. I have given you a gun. If I were as free and unknown as you are I would deal with that pig myself, though it wasn't my family he finished off. And you can tell him that, if you have time."

Over the weekend I worked hard on the estate. Also, I studied the local papers and thought about how to cover my tracks, and brooded over some one-inch Ordnance Survey maps, and talked my overseer into persuading me that I ought to go to a sheep sale on the Welsh border.

I hid the gun in the safe till Monday morning, when I took it out and wrapped it in a rag and stowed it in the Land-Rover's toolbox, which had a lock and key. I put on tweeds and a mackintosh and a cap, and got out my fishing-tackle and a pair of field glasses, and set off after breakfast. I'd decided on the Land-Rover because it's the sort of vehicle people don't take much notice of in the country—it melts into the landscape—and because no one would expect it to be clean. A lavish coating of mud makes the number plates less legible.

It was a day of showers and patches of brilliant sun, the hills were blue and green and ash-gold, and I wished I were going after salmon instead of Germans.

I avoided the village (or rather hamlet—two cottages and a farm) near the pub he was staying at, in case he was having a stroll after lunch, and came out on a lane higher up. The valley is narrow and very beautiful, with trees and rocks and plenty of undergrowth affording ideal cover.

I left the Land-Rover well above the pub's territory, on the cropped grass between the lane and the river, without attempting to hide it. I unwrapped the gun and put it in my pocket, and slung the field glasses over my shoulder.

I had a feeling I wasn't doing it right, somehow; it should have been more melodramatic, more intense, instead of having this sort of flat unreality.

Crossing the river and keeping well out of sight, I tracked downstream above the bank. It was easy enough to stay hidden, and the fall and ripple of water drowned any faint noises. But I was no

longer back in the Maquis; I was an Englishman, an undignified one, too old in my forties to be playing cowboys and Indians in a Welsh valley. There were moments when I was tempted to turn back, forget Wessler, make some excuse to Etienne. But I was too far committed.

If I hadn't been able to see his face, I shouldn't have known him. Germans tend to overdress for sport, to be too correct and meticulous, but he was perfectly and convincingly English, a chap who'd been fishing for years in the same battered but expensive clothes. Like the Land-Rover, he was part of the scenery. But he was standing in the water two or three yards from the bank, and I could see his profile. The profile was enough.

I climbed silently farther up the side of the valley, and worked my way along till I could see the whole stretch of river down to the pub, a little whitewashed cube of stone built into the slope of the hill. There was no one else in sight. I skulked back along the hillside till I was directly above Wessler and the pool. I squatted on the damp grass, awkwardly because of my bad knee, and took out the field glasses.

He was still in the same place, fishing with an air of dedication. He was right-handed, which was something I had to make sure of. The glasses were powerful, and he sprang sharply into focus. With his antique hat covering his receding hair, he looked younger. For the first time that day the Frenchman in me got the upper hand. I regained, to some extent, the primitive feeling I'd had when I'd first seen him at the King's Arms.

Dispassionately, from behind a net of young alder leaves, I watched him catch his last trout. He did it expertly and patiently. It wasn't very large, but he seemed pleased, and irrationally I felt pleased, too, that at least he'd had some sport before the end. The fish was still flapping on the bank when I stepped out of the alders and said, " Wessler! "

He turned sharply; but who wouldn't, if he believed himself alone and a voice spoke suddenly from six yards away, whatever it said? His was not an expressive face, and his training had been rigid; he appeared, if anything, startled and puzzled. I put my hand in my pocket and took hold of the gun, and watched his eyes follow the movement. He said, " I beg your pardon? "

" Wessler," I said, " don't you remember me? "

On the grass by his feet the trout went into a desperate contortion. He didn't look at it. He said, " I'm afraid not. You must be mistaking me for someone else."

" You *were* someone else, Wilson," I said. " It's not a mistake."

" I'm sorry; I don't know what you're talking about."

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I wanted to get it over, to end this conversation. He was putting on a good act, but not good enough for me. Through the correct and well-worn tweed I could sense the rigidity of his muscles; he spoke easily, but he watched my eyes with the unblinking stare of a cat. It wasn't going to be easy; but for better or worse, I was in it now, up to the neck. I said, "All right, I'll tell you. I'm talking about twenty years ago. You were a captain in the German army, and I was disguised as the village idiot. I was called Pierre. The village was called Marise."

At that he changed colour; the scar on his temple showed less white. "Everyone has a double," he said.

"Your wife tells me you talk in your sleep. In German. She thinks Marise was a woman." I took the gun out of my pocket. "Is that enough?"

"Can you ever be sure?" he said. "Can you believe everything? Can I believe you know my wife?"

"Her name was Aurelia Lang. She paints. You've been married seven years and you have no children. Your house in Madderfield is thatched. Will that do?"

He made no answer. His face glistened with sweat now and I knew he was defeated. It was an effort to keep my mind in the past; I fought against being an Englishman talking to another Englishman in a sunlit valley, with the river beside us and a trout shining in the grass. A pastoral scene, with only the gun to spoil it.

"I had a wife too," I said, "and a child that wasn't born. My wife was one of the ones you ordered shot. So was her brother, who was thirteen. If you remember, you had the rest of the village herded out to watch. I had to stand there while you—" I couldn't go on talking. He stood looking at me, without moving. I said, "Put your hands up and turn round."

"Do I sound German?" he said.

I released the safety catch.

"I'm Wilson," he said. "I'm English, like you."

"And Marise was a girl you met in Piccadilly," I said. "And I am only half English. The rest is French. Do as I say."

He raised his hands and faced down the valley, with his back to me.

And right then, when I had him helpless, I lost my resolve.

"Damn you, Wessler," I said. "I wish I had your guts for murder," and I turned away and climbed the slope, blundering into branches and stumbling over roots.

The journey home remains a blur; I remember glancing automatically at signposts, and feeling cold, and thinking that I ought to do something about hiding the gun, which was lying on the

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seat beside me, and for some reason deciding not to. A symbol of defeat, perhaps—or of a clear conscience. What did Oscar Wilde write? " Conscience and cowardice are really the same things. Conscience is the trade-name of the firm. That is all."

When I got home I pulled myself together, locked the gun in the toolbox of the Land-Rover, gave the overseer a brief and probably inaccurate account of the sheep sale, and went indoors. I had a brandy-and-soda to loosen up, and began to think.

Now I cursed myself for ever having started my scheme of revenge. I tried to put myself in Wessler's place. Was it possible that his change of name and nationality was legal and above board? Not likely. If it had been, he would surely have told his wife.

That night I lay awake till nearly dawn, thinking in circles. Rain beat on the windows; gusts of wind bent the trees. Wessler, perhaps, was sleepless too, listening to the river; or had he abandoned his holiday, raced home to find out what his wife knew? Was he awake in his own bed now, planning how to silence me?

In the morning there was another letter from Etienne. I tore the envelope open with some apprehension, expecting a message of congratulation for having finished the job; but it wasn't that. He wrote, in French, " It is necessary for me to be in Bristol on Wednesday morning, to plan a programme. On Tuesday, when you will receive this, I can stay the night with you. I will arrive at five-thirty. If you are still engaged elsewhere, no matter; it is hardly out of my way. I hope the news is good." It was signed with a regal flourish, " E."

I read the letter with mixed feelings. There would be some sticky explanations to get through, but on the whole I was cheered up. Etienne would not waste time on recriminations; what I needed most was someone to talk to, who had brains and imagination and knew the whole situation. Only Etienne qualified. Only he could help me decide what to do next.

He drove up in a black Mercedes. He was wearing tweeds. I reflected that whereas Wessler in tweeds looked utterly right and English, Etienne in the same sort of clothes was unmistakably French; and that Wessler in his German days would never have bought a French car, whereas Etienne had picked a German one. This seemed to prove something; I didn't know what.

" But it is ravishing," he said, looking up at the house. " I had no idea."

" It is a good period."

"All this and no woman," Etienne said, as if to himself. He

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followed me into the hall and spent some minutes bounding around and exploring and exclaiming. Finally I got him cornered and pacified with a sherry. I don't usually have sherry till six or later, but I needed one.

As with the Marsala, we discussed its finer points, rather abstractedly on my side. Etienne was always difficult to shift from the subject of wine, unless it was on to the subject of food, and he had the whole evening before him; but at last he stopped, raised formidable black eyebrows at me, and said, " Well? "

" Oh, I found him. It was all exactly right, everything was perfect. Only I couldn't do it."

Etienne made an expressive and vulgar sound, and I lit a cigarette, with a poor attempt at nonchalance. " So, then," he said. " Let us hear this sad story."

I recounted it, without excuses, which never got one anywhere with Etienne. From his expression I could see he was reaching, though more quickly, the same conclusions I had. "And so now," he said, after a pause, when I had finished, " we are what you call in English out of the kettle into the fire."

" Frying pan," I said absently. " Kettles are of fish."

" Listen, this is how that rat thinks. He says to himself, ' The man knows about me, and he knows my wife. He has not the guts to kill me but he has a grudge and he will work it off somehow, and telling my wife would be one way. Or he could tell the whole world.' I do not think Wessler is going to sit down and wait; he is not the type. You and I know what type he is: murder is easy for him, and he would be jealous like a madman to keep what he has."

" He didn't look like that," I said, " when I nearly shot him."

Etienne lit one of his Gauloises. " He thinks fast," he said. " He will not waste time. He will give up his fishing and go home, in case you should tell his wife. From what you tell me, she has no suspicions. The way he would do it, she would hardly know she was being questioned. So, he will have your name and address. So, if he has a chance of safety, he will not tell her anything; he will first try to dispatch you."

" Yes. I seem to have rather botched things up all round, don't I? "

" Considerably. However, what's done is done. This is more important, what we do now. I don't concern myself with you— you are experienced enough not to be taken by surprise. But there is his wife."

" That's what I was thinking too."

" He can't watch her every moment, that is clear. Any time, he says to himself, you may tell her the truth. Does she love him? "

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" It's only an impression," I said, " but I would say no."

"And he is jealous, she implied."

" So? " I said. I filled the sherry glasses.

" The least we can do is to make sure, if we can, that she is safe. Obviously you cannot telephone. For me it is simple. I am Albert Leblanc; I represent a French firm interested in starting a small plastics industry near Rouen. I would like to inspect Mr. Wilson's factory. Yes? "

" Yes."

" You have an extension? "

" In my office."

" Then listen in. The number? "

I found the number for him, and took my sherry with me to the desk littered with forms about pigs and sheep, and lifted the receiver. I heard Mrs. Wilson answer, and my palms began to sweat.

I heard Etienne say, " May I speak to Mr. Wilson, please? "

" I'm sorry," she said. " He's not—he's just gone out. Can I take a message? "

" This is Mrs. Wilson, yes? My name is Leblanc, it is a business call, I apologise for troubling you, but I have not much time over here. Perhaps I could telephone later? "

" Yes—I don't know," she said. She sounded distracted, very close to tears. " I don't know when he'll be back. He—I'm so sorry. Could I ask him to ring you? "

" Please don't worry. I am staying in the district—as it happens with a friend who would like to speak with you. A moment."

I said, " Mrs. Wilson. This is Fleming. You remember me? "

" Of course. But—"

" Monsieur "—in the state of mind I was in I nearly gave her Etienne's real name, but I stopped myself in time—" Monsieur Leblanc is staying with me."

" Mr. Fleming," she said after a hesitation, " you haven't—I suppose you haven't seen my husband? "

I said, " Is anything the matter? "

" Something is," she said. " But I don't know what. He came back from Wales today, instead of next week. He started asking me all about you, all sorts of questions—who you were, where you lived—I couldn't imagine why. I didn't—he looks so strange and angry, as if he'd had some kind of a shock. I didn't understand what it was all about. How could he have—"

" Where is he now? " I said.

" He went out—oh, about twenty minutes ago. I thought of ringing you up but I didn't want to bother you. He hasn't taken

his car—I suppose he's gone to the pub. That won't help either. I am sorry, but it's rather worrying."

" Madame," Etienne said on the other instrument. " Forgive me for interfering. I think it is very important that you should come over here at once. I cannot explain on the telephone. Please believe me. Ask Mr. Fleming if he agrees."

" Yes," I said. " It is truly very important."

" But—"

" You'll have to trust us. Will you come, *now*? "

"All right," she said. " How do I get there? "

I gave her a few simple directions and rang off.

I wasn't hungry, but not even the Wessler situation could distract Etienne altogether from food. He fell with enthusiasm on the soup, beef and salad. I said, " You think we ought to tell her? "

" But of course. What else can we do? "

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" Hell, I've done enough. I don't want to make things worse."

" Look, she has to know, now. She has to be warned. If one starts something, one must see it through. You know as well as I do what Wessler is capable of. Stop being so English, I implore you. The Brie looks excellent," Etienne said.

Whether its taste was as good as its looks I never knew; we heard the sound of a car, and Etienne stiffened, the knife poised in mid-air. I got up and crossed the hall and opened the front door.

She had come in a little black car I'd seen in the garage when I called at *Thatchers*. It had begun to rain, and the car glistened with drops. She was bareheaded and dressed in a thick jersey, light-coloured slacks smeared with paint, and sandals. In these clothes, and with little make-up, she looked enchanting. She stood there in silence. I said, " Do come in. It didn't take you long. You found the way without trouble? "

" Yes, I'm a good navigator. Your house is very beautiful."

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I led her across the hall and into the living-room. Etienne appeared from the kitchen, swallowing what was doubtless Brie. She said, " Oh—but you're—"

" That is so." Etienne, never one for false modesty, bent over her hand with one of his flourishes. " It was necessary to use a false name on the telephone. You understand? "

" Please, what is this all about? "

I kicked the log fire and seated her by it, poured her a sherry and looked despairingly at Etienne, who said, " Madame, it is a long story and we are desolated to have to tell it to you. But as things have turned out we think it is better you should know. It begins in the war, in France." He described our work in the Maquis and my disguise as Pierre, and my meeting with him and my marriage, and the affair of the hostages. Being Etienne, he told it colourfully, though accurately. She listened attentively, but puzzled, watching the smoke of her cigarette. When he paused, she said, " But what has this to do with me? "

" The name of the village was Marise."

She looked directly at Etienne. She said, " You mean Wessler—"

" Wessler is William Wilson."

In the silence that followed, a log slipped and crackled. Outside, the wind blew rain against the windows. Finally she said, " I can't believe it."

" You had no idea? "

" None at all. Now you've told me, I suppose it's possible. He's never talked much about his past; he does speak German; he's mentioned Marise in his sleep. I don't know German. I thought—I just thought it was a girl. How did he get here, become British, never any suspicion from anyone? How could he do that? "

I wasn't looking forward to the next bit, but it seemed to be my turn. I said, " We don't know. There are ways, I dare say. We found out because I was lunching in a pub at Hamptonford and he was there. I recognised him."

" It was nice of you to tell me," she said. She looked pale, but gave me a composed smile; she made no attempt to defend her husband. She said, " What do I do now? "

" Madame," Etienne said, " forgive me if I ask this. Do you love him? "

She said slowly, " No. I ought not to have married him. The successful businessman's wife isn't my thing. I want to paint and raise children. He doesn't approve of the one and he can't manage the other. I suppose you mean I should leave him? "

" It would be safer. Would you be happier? "

" Probably I would. I think it would have come to that anyway—it's not the first time I've considered it. I can earn enough to keep myself and do the work I like doing . . . You mustn't blame yourself," she said to me.

" But I do."

I got up and walked around the room. It was dark now and a wild night, raining hard and with a gale rising and howling through the trees. I started drawing the curtains, a thing it might have been advisable to think of sooner, but normally it's my housekeeper's job and in the stress I'd forgotten. Etienne went to do the other window, a large one with a glass-panelled door in the middle, leading to the garden. " Well, anyway," I said, pulling red velvet across the storm, " you can't go back if he's there."

" He's not," Etienne said gently, over his shoulder.

" What? "

" He's not." He had one hand on the curtain. I turned and looked past him through the wet glass into the dark.

" Herr Wessler," Etienne said, opening the door. " *Kommen Sie herein, bitte.*"

There was a draught of wind and a billow of smoke from the fire as Wessler came into the room. His hair and the shoulders of his raincoat were wet, but no more of him. The sound of a car driven quietly, I realised, could not have been heard over the loud wind. He had his hands in his pockets, and he looked wild and distraught, not glancing at his wife but fixing his eyes on me. Etienne, with the speed that I remembered from Maquis days, shut the door and moved over to the low table where I'd left Gaston's gun. He sat on the arm of a chair, within reach of it, and waited for Wessler to make a move.

" You've told her," Wessler said.

" Since you had not," Etienne said, right back in his element, " we thought it best."

With no change of expression, Wessler said, " I've often wondered where I'd seen you before."

" It is to be excused," Etienne said. " You did not see me more than I could help, and I looked very different."

" It was twenty years ago. Since then we've made something of our lives. Then, it was war. You fought us and we fought you; it was our duty."

" Look—" I said.

" The English," Etienne said, brushing me aside, " are not good haters. Fleming is half French, but the English side of him is stronger. He has reason enough for shooting you, but give him an inch and he will forgive you instead. An inch, and he will be

saying, ' From this nation came Bach and Beethoven and Goethe and Schiller, and war is war, and it was indeed twenty years ago.' He has courage and he has fought, but he has not seen his own lands raped by the Boches as I have twice in my lifetime."

" You left your country," Wessler said, " to live here too."

" Legitimately," Etienne said. " I teach the English to cook. They know I am French. Do they know you are a Boche? "

Wessler shrugged.

" Look, Wessler," I said, " why did you come to this house? "

" To find my wife," he said, " and take her back. But I see it's no good."

"At least," Etienne said, " unlike Fleming's wife, she is alive. She can answer for herself."

Turning his head a little, but still watching me, Wessler said, "Are you coming, Aurelia? "

She looked at me too, in silence for a moment, and then she said, " I can't. Knowing all this, I can't."

" Very wise," Etienne said, still holding the gun. His eyes were narrowed and he wore the expression I associated with a scrub of beard and a stinking beret and plans of bridges drawn in chalk on a table, behind locked doors.

Wessler took his hands out of his pockets. Etienne stood up. I moved automatically between Wessler and his wife. His face had changed; it struck me, for the first time, that he'd had a good deal to drink. He said, in German, " This I will tell you. If it were war, I would do it again."

He turned quickly and ran out the door. Etienne dived after him, calling over his shoulder, " Stay there! "

Even now, the habit of obeying Etienne's commands was still with me. They had always been precise and right; we had always trusted them. I shut the door, with a feeling of complete unreality—after so long, this *can't* be happening.

" You must trust Etienne," I said.

" Yes."

THE sound of the crash was like an electric shock through our fingers; I remember feeling as if my whole arm were dead. " Please," I said, " please stay here." Then I found myself running awkwardly up the drive, tripping over branches blown down by the gale. The drive is short, and leads into a minor road not much used. Through the trees, near the sharp bend along the lane, I could see lights. Somehow I got outside the gates, panting and sweating. The headlamps were Etienne's Mercedes; they

shone on an empty lane, a gap in the underbrush and the twisted ends of torn railings at the edge of the quarry.

Etienne came towards me out of the darkness, breathing hard, but sounding calm. He said, " Do exactly as I say."

" But Wessler—"

" I was following, to see he went away. He took the bend too fast. So, a skid; the car went over."

" Is he dead? "

" Look for yourself," Etienne said, and he gave me a flashlight. The light reached faintly, down among the brambles, to what was left of Wessler's car. I felt sick.

" Go and tell her," he said. " She must be at home as soon as possible; and it's better she doesn't come this way. Then wait for me. Are there houses near, that might have heard? "

" Only two cottages, a quarter of a mile away. They'll be glued to television."

" And traffic? "

" With luck, nothing."

" Go, then," Etienne said, and disappeared into the dark.

I blundered back to the house. She was still huddled by the fire. She said, " Who was it? "

" Your—it was Wessler's car. He skidded over the edge into the quarry."

" Is he dead? "

" Yes." Or if not, I thought grimly, he will be any moment.

I took her hand again and said, " Listen—I want you to do as Etienne says. It happened in the lane. No one knows he has been here. I want you to go home right away, before we ring the police. They'll let you know; and you must be there. Ring me up when you get back. Pretend it's a wrong number, just so I'll know you're safe. I'll telephone you later. You needn't go by the drive—I'll show you a track that brings you out down the lane, through a gate. No one will see you."

" Yes," she said. She was pale, but perfectly calm; more than ever she reminded me of Nicole.

I said, " You are very like my wife. She was brave too. Do you think you can ever forgive me? "

" I see nothing to forgive," she said.

" You would have been good in the Maquis. Listen . . ." I said.

" Yes? "

" No, not now. I'll telephone."

Standing by the hedge, with one ear cocked for sounds from Etienne, I watched her lights go down the track, stop before and after the gate—a woman in a thousand, I thought, who in such

circumstances could think of the importance to a farmer of not leaving gates open—and disappear among the trees farther down the hill. I went back to the house.

By this time I was soaking wet. In a minute Etienne returned. I poured two stiff brandies.

" In five minutes we will arouse the police. He was coming up the lane, they'll think, and we heard the crash, and I took my car and went to help, and you followed on foot. This I took out of his pocket." Etienne produced an automatic. " Perhaps better, I thought, they should not find a Boche gun on the English Mr. Wilson. Hide it, and the other gun too."

I went into my office and locked both guns, Wessler's and Gaston's, in the safe. I was reminded of *Macbeth*, the murder of Banquo:

. . . Safe in a ditch he bides,
With twenty trenched gashes on his head;
The least a death to nature.

I got back to my brandy before my teeth began to chatter; I'd hardly have been surprised to see Wessler, like Banquo's ghost, sitting there waiting for me. I said, " Etienne? "

" Well? "

" Did you—"

" Would I risk my neck," said Etienne, " when he has the sense to break his own? "

That was a year last spring. An inquest was held on William Wilson of Madderfield in the county of Gloucester, and the verdict was " accidental death." Six months later I married Aurelia; six months from now our child will be born, with Etienne to be its godfather. This is everything I ever wanted, but I still dream some nights of Marise, and of Wessler. Aurelia kicks me awake, saying, " Try to forget. It was a long time ago." I do try to forget. I must go on trying.

© Margaret Bonham 1964

★ ***Inspector Maigret in an exciting SIMENON***
in Argosy next month.

SOLUTION TO TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD
(PAGE 167)

ACROSS. 1, Bottom. 4, Local. 7, Tenderfoot. 8, Tyre. 9, Horse. 11, Roadman. 13, Learner. 15, Hotel. 17, Bean. 18, Buccaneers. 20, Treat. 21, Tights.

DOWN. 1, Batter. 2, Tree. 3, Medical. 4, Larch. 5, Coo. 6, Lathe. 7, Truant. 10, Ranges. 12, Nearest. 14, Renews. 15, Habit. 16, Least. 17, Brag. 19, Cue.

Leisure-Pleasure

In which we set the pace for colder weather enjoyment . . .

TRY talking about curries and see what happens!

Every aspiring chef who has been within whistling distance of India or the Far East will swear by his own special recipe.

Some prepare their own curry powder; some insist on fresh grated coconut milk, green ginger, ghee; some prepare their own chapatis and poppadums, and some spend happy hours on the making of chutneys to go with the curry.

But for the less exigent there are easier ways!

First the basic recipe, possible to adapt in a dozen different ways. The amount of curry powder put into it, makes it hot or mild—but the finished result must always be rich, brown, fruity and soft.

BASIC CURRY:

2 tablespoons bacon fat; 2 large onions; ½ lb. tomatoes; 1 cooking apple; 1 banana; 2 tablespoons shredded or dessicated coconut; 1 sweet pepper (optional); 2 tablespoons seedless raisins (optional); juice of half a lemon; a little sugar (to taste) 2 teaspoons curry powder, or more to taste.

Peel and chop the onions and fry them till brown in the bacon fat. Peel and slice the tomatoes and add them. Add the curry powder and a little salt and pepper and stir well. Cook slowly together for a few minutes, stirring occasionally, then add one cupful of cold water and stir again. Peel and slice the apple and add, then the shredded pepper, the coconut, raisins, lemon juice and sugar. Cover and cook slowly for one hour, then add the sliced banana and continue to cook for half an hour more, by which time you've achieved a thick and creamy mixture.

Taste, add more curry powder or seasoning if required. You can now add pieces of cooked meat, chicken, rabbit or fish. Cover again and cook quickly for ten minutes. Remove from the heat; beat up an egg and stir it in quickly. Serve with boiled rice, mango chutney, lime chutney, and tinned poppadums.

VARIATIONS:

(1) The egg and the raisins are omitted. This curry can be put through a sieve, reheated and poured over hard-boiled or poached eggs. Served with the same accompaniments.

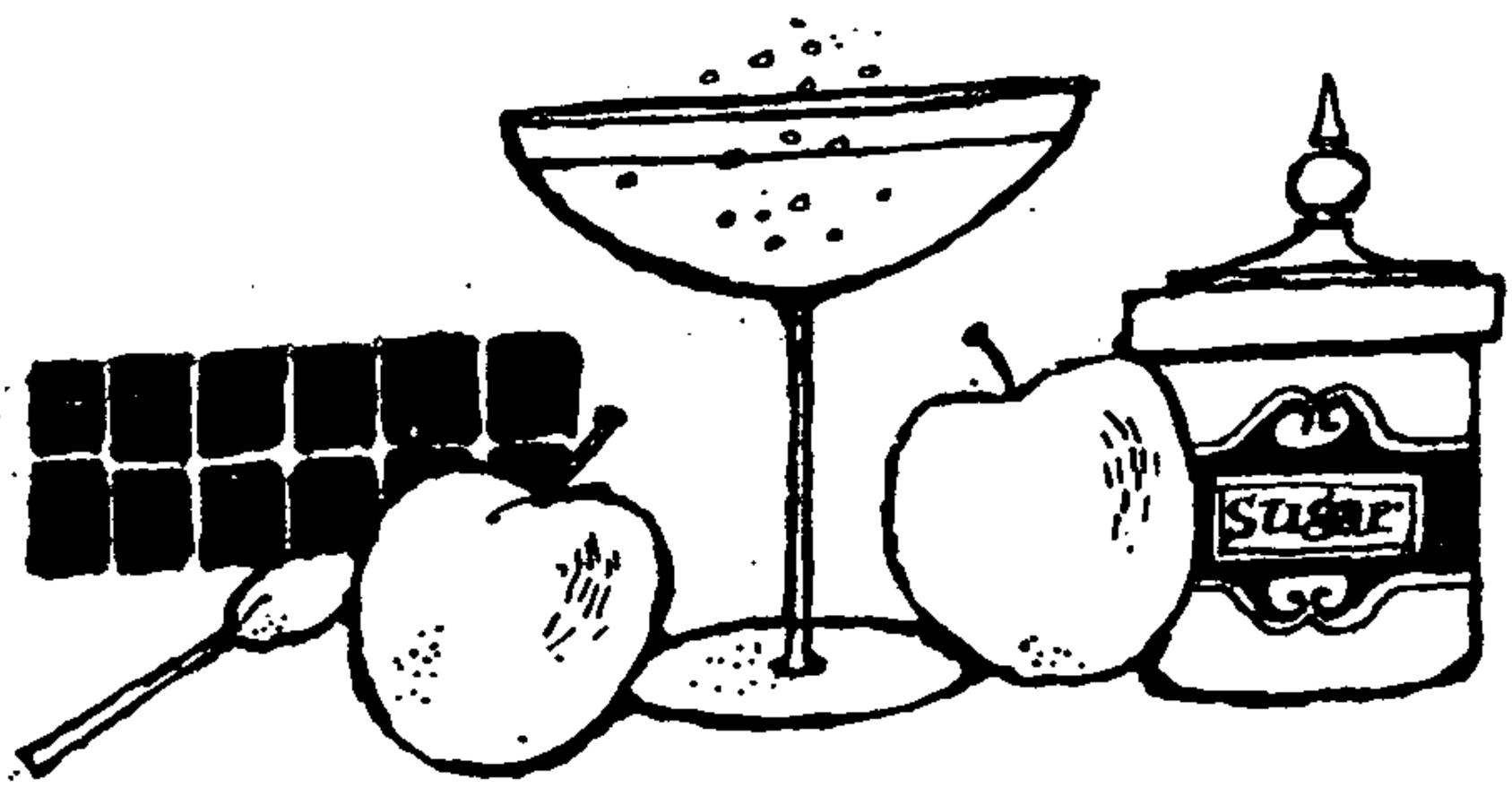
(2) For a vegetable curry, heat a tin of macedoine of vegetables, add to the curry, and reheat.

If you are using raw meat or chicken, add to the curry when you add the water.

PILAU OF CHICKEN:

1 roasting chicken—2½ to 3 lbs. when cleaned; 1 minced clove of garlic; 2 Spanish onions; 1 sweet pepper; 2 teaspoons curry powder; ½ lb. streaky bacon; ½ teaspoon each white and cayenne pepper; 1 dessertspoon salt; 1 cupful raw rice.

Cut the chicken into serving portions. Mix the minced garlic with the salt and peppers and rub thoroughly into the pieces of chicken. Dice the bacon and dry quickly in a heavy pan till crisp and most of the fat is released. Prepare and slice the onions and the sweet pepper, put into the pan with the chicken pieces and stir well. Add the curry powder, continuing to stir, and finally add just enough boiling water to cover the chicken. Cover the pan, and simmer for an hour. Then wash and dry the rice, add to the pan, and bring immediately to the boil. Cook quickly till the rice begins to swell; reduce the heat to simmering point and cover the pan. Cook for twenty to thirty minutes, or until the rice has absorbed all the liquid and looks dry and grainy. Serve with mango chutney and cucumber salad.



PRAWN OR LOBSTER BIRIANI:

1 tin lobster or prawns (or 1 pint fresh prawns or shrimps); 1 tablespoon butter; 1 diced onion; 1 cupful cold boiled rice; 1 teaspoon curry powder (or more to taste); 1 egg; a little salt.

Melt the butter in a pan and cook the onion gently till golden. Add the shellfish, sprinkle with salt, and cook for a few minutes, stirring, so that the onion is mixed with the fish. Add the rice, and stir well, so that all is blended. Stir in the curry powder, then the beaten egg, and cook gently, stirring until the egg is completely merged with the rest of the ingredients. Serve with a fresh tomato salad, sprinkled with parsley and a little tarragon, if available.

DRINKING WITH CURRY:

Now we come to the difficult question of what to drink with curry for it has a bouquet and flavour of its own strong enough to resist competition. So if one wants to drink wine with curry it is necessary to choose one of notable strength, such as a Chilean or Spanish red burgundy, an Italian wine such as Tuscan Red, a Hungarian Egri Bakaver, " Bullocks Blood," or a wine of Algeria, for in that country they do drink their wine with highly spiced foods. And there is a very important factor to be kept in mind—a well-made curry stimulates the thirst, and all these wines have a high alcohol content ! One way round this difficulty is to do what the Frenchman does with his strong " vin du pays " —break it down with water.

By and large, beer is a better bet for your curry meal. With their " Rice Table "—the hot and highly spiced dishes of the East Indies—the Dutch drink cold lager. Dutch, British, German or Danish lagers are equally good, but they must be cold. An alternative is to forget all about alcoholic drinks and go for a " soft " one. The cola varieties go well with curry, but again they must be chilled. Orange or lemon squashes fill the bill, and so does cold tea, without milk but with a sprig of mint crushed into the glass. Perhaps the best of all is barley water made in the old-fashioned way. Before the war a jug of it used to be kept on the serving table of every London Club worthy of its name.

Finally, what should one drink as an aperitif before a curry meal? The answer is something that has an " edge " on it, such as Campari with ice, soda and a slice of lemon; a Dutch gin, chilled, and Bokmaa is the best though mighty expensive in Britain; a really dry fine sherry, or perhaps best of all, a Chambery Vermouth, plain and cold.

BOOKSHELF THIS MONTH:

DEI Gratia runs the legend round the edge of our coins of the realm: by the Grace of God. And so it was with those two monarchs of the 17th century, Charles I of England and Louis XIV of France. Born around twenty years apart, they shared this one ineluctable belief—the Divine Right of Kings.

First Charles.

The tremendous drama and its tragic aftermath comes to life for us in C. V. Wedgwood's **The Trial of Charles I.**

There sits the elegant, tired, defeated king, still unshakable in his sense of royal prerogative; and there stands Cromwell, his enemy, cold, assured, implacable in victory, and it is as though we too were there watching the final hours of this unnatural fight.

Then comes the end. Judgment is passed.

Not by treachery or in the heat of battle, but by the will of his people a king is killed by his people.

As always Miss Wedgwood's cool, detached prose is a pleasure, and the many extracts from the news sheets and woodcuts of the day add imaginative detail. Did you know that, as for the beheading of Charles' predecessor, the luckless Ann Boleyn, a star executioner in elaborate disguise was employed at high cost (Ann's was brought over especially from France!) and that a broadsheet illustrating this very scene (inaccurately!) can still be found in the British Museum?

Then Louis.

Vincent Cronin's **Louis XIV** makes good reading. Until just the tail-end of his life Louis was a splendid king. He, too, accepted with calm certainty his special status with God. Fortunately for the most part his subjects shared this view, so, unlike poor Charles, he reigned successfully as an absolute monarch for many long years.

Obviously it is people, men and women in the background of their time, who fascinate Cronin. He writes of Europe and France in the 17th century not as past history but as the lively setting for this richly colourful man, Le Roi-soleil, and his amazing court.

There is the handsome, vigorous king himself, the golden centre of his stage; the crafty, self-taught politician Mazarin and his adorably pretty niece Marie Mancini loved by the prince she could never marry; the arrogant, treacherous Prince Condé; Christina, that astonishing Queen of Sweden, who strode through the fabulous French court like a man, and dressed and loved like one too. And, of course, that strange and secret woman Madame de Maintenon, who started her long association with

Louis when she smuggled out the new-born unwanted babies—his bastards—from the very bed of his mistress, the de Montespan, and was herself to become his last and greatest love.

Cronin describes it all vividly—from the tense, dangerous childhood of the fatherless prince to the near-barbaric splendour of his Coronation and the triumphs and disasters of his many wars, to when finally the many-sided Roi-soleil realised his long-held dream of beauty in the planning and building of Versailles, a few short years before his death.

A brilliant and wonderful book. Do get it.

Few writers are as sure of a captive audience as A. J. Cronin, the father of Vincent, who has a list of fourteen successful novels—since **Hatter's Castle**, that grim enough picture of a dour Scottish home, written when he himself was recovering from a severe breakdown brought on by years of over-work. It was the instant success of this first book which made it possible for Cronin to give up medicine and take up writing in its stead.

And what good reading, these stories of men and women who live as they must, fighting doggedly for a place in their own particular worlds, and for some small measure of happiness. Often bitter reading, as living itself is often bitter, and always compelling us to go on to find out what happens to these people with whom we become so intimately involved.

A Song of Sixpence is the story of Laurence Carroll as he grows from childhood to adult life. Set in and around Glasgow at the turn of the century, the book brims over with good things and with colourful people; people who are kind, cruel, eccentric, brave, and all vividly alive.

There is Grace, Laurence's young, widowed mother, struggling valiantly to take over the part of bread-winner when the sudden death of her husband brings them to the very edge of disaster; the strange Miss Greville who teaches elementary botany; poor daft Maggie.

And Uncle Leo has made a fortune out of the poor of Glasgow, and is landlord of many of the city's most repellant slums. He is the worst sort of miser, rolling in money but living as a pauper, all but starving those around him. Laurence, who is his nephew, becomes one of these.

Laurence has always wanted above all things to win the bursary which will get him to medical school, but the sheer need to survive finally forces him to the cold uncertain refuge of his uncle's home. Leo puts him to work for his food (mostly porridge!), for the payment of sixpence a week, and life is bleak.

But the friendship and night-time coaching of an old schoolmaster, Pin Rogers, turn up to help, and we leave him, his first young love affair behind and manhood ahead, confidently on his way to success.

Cronin has said that the only way to write really well is to feel it in your heart. **A Song of Sixpence** suggests the author has done just that.

Napoleon is quoted as saying that one spy in the right place was worth an extra twenty thousand men in the field to him. The same might be said of one spy story chosen by the right editor!

This it seems has been found in that knowledgeable, sophisticated old hand, Eric Ambler, who has just produced and introduced an anthology, **To Catch A Spy.**

He has taken the best or near best of half-a-dozen successful authors including Graham Greene's **I Spy;** one of Somerset Maugham's incomparable Ashenden group; Michael Gilbert's **On Slay Down;** which just appeared in Argosy a couple of years back; a Buchan; one of Ian Fleming's cleverest, **From a View to a Kill;** and a Compton Mackenzie from **The Three Couriers,** a book which has long been out of print. A specially edited extract from his own best-seller, **The Mask of Dimitrios** rounds off the anthology, and is included, faute de mieux, as Ambler himself has never tried his skill with a short spy story.

To me the best part of the mixture is the editor's Introduction, a discussion of the origin and development of these tales of espionage and intrigue, the very first of which was published surprisingly, as late as the twentieth century.

Ronald Hamilton is a master at Winchester and just the man to know what we are likely to forget and ought to remember! **Now I Remember** takes us on a painless journey through our own country, filling in as we go our kings and queens and their odd adventures in matrimony, what happened at which castle and who got slain before which altar. A history re-cap without tears and the perfect present for visitors from abroad.

BOOKS REVIEWED:

C. V. Wedgwood, *The Trial of Charles I* (Collins 30s.)
Vincent Cronin, *Louis XIV* (Collins 36s.)
A. J. Cronin, *A Song of Sixpence* (Heinemann 21s.)
Eric Ambler introduces, *To Catch A Spy* (Bodley Head 16s.)
Ronald Hamilton, *Now I Remember* (Chatto & Windus 21s.)

OUR MAN IN MOTORS WRITES:

"FOR ADULTS ONLY" is the heading for a recent Lotus advertisement, and although it is not for the Lotus Cortina, it equally applies, for in an exciting month for motoring I have been driving a truly exciting car, and believe me this is no boy's toy!

Externally there is little difference between this special equipment Lotus Cortina and a Standard Ford Cortina. It is lower, the tyres look definitely fatter, and the front bumper is split into two corner pieces with a dark green flash extending from the sides round the tail and a small Lotus badge fore and aft.

Inside, the front seats are more lavishly upholstered. There's a nice stubby gear lever, racing steering wheel and a full set of instruments. It is not until the engine is throbbing quietly that you get the first faint inkling of what is in store. The first tentative dab on the throttle confirms this as the seat gathers you firmly round the back and with breathtaking acceleration the rev counter is heading into the red before you have a chance to change gear. What is more, this sort of performance goes right up the scale to just over the 100 m.p.h. mark; it then takes longer to build up to the maximum of around 114 m.p.h.

With a performance such as this, one needs both excellent brakes and leech-like road-holding, and the Lotus Cortina possesses both in full measure.

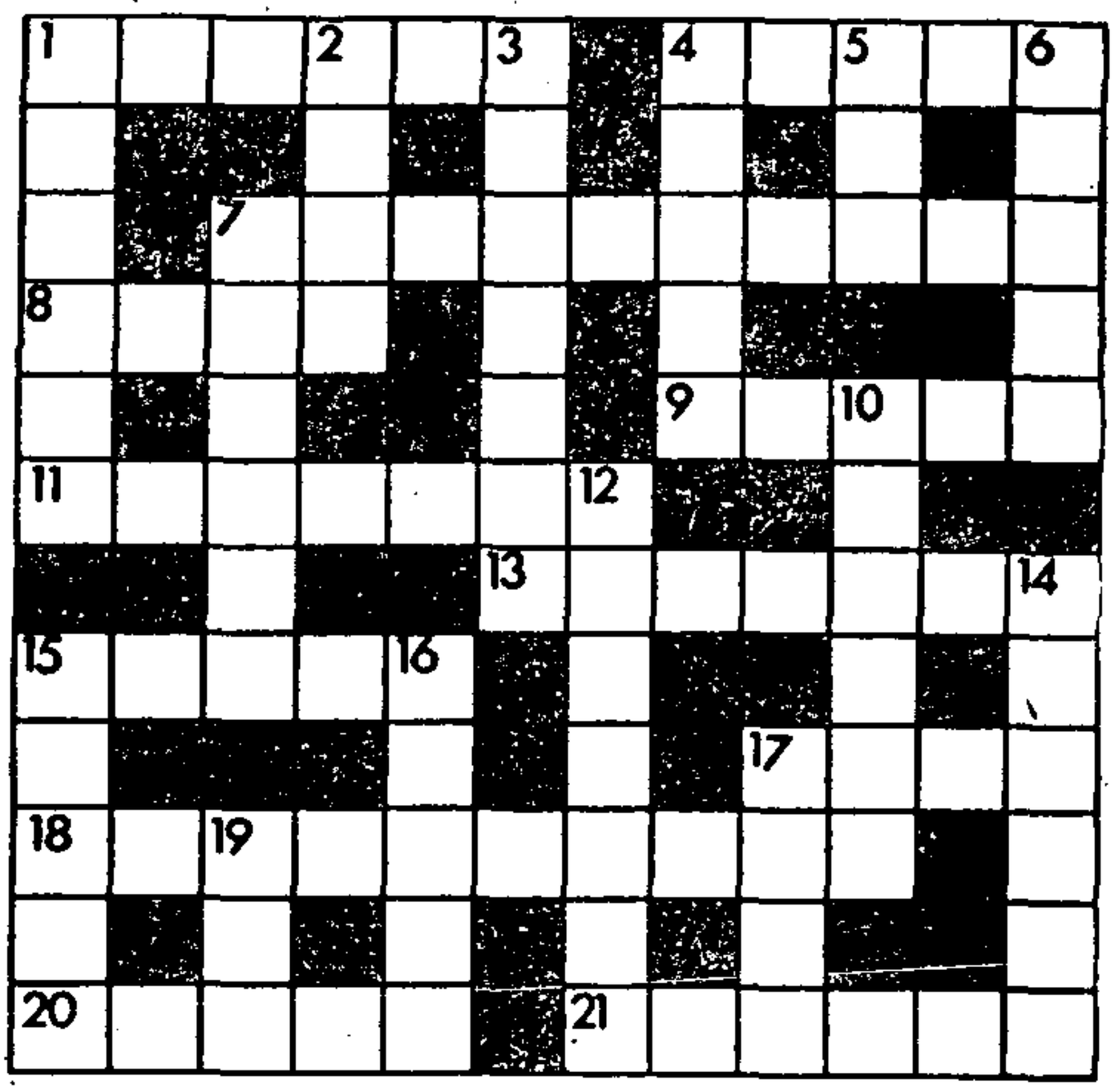
The test car was fitted with Pirelli Cinturato tyres and the handling felt absolutely safe and predictable all the time, although there tends to be a slight waver in a straight line faintly reminiscent of a vintage Frazer-Nash.

I have often said that no-one makes anything that really goes and has plenty of room inside, without costing the earth: I now eat my words, for the Lotus Cortina is a full four-seater with a vast luggage boot. What a pity Lotus have not gone the whole hog and put a sensible-sized petrol tank; with a consumption of just over 22 m.p.g., an eight gallon tank needs frequent refilling.

Inside the comfort level is high both front and back, and there is plenty of leg room; the front seats are extremely comfortable and well shaped, holding one well on corners. Despite the safety harness in the car, I would like to see a passenger grab handle for fast motoring.

Underneath the aluminium bonnet quite naturally one expects to find something out of the ordinary, and there is no disappointment. The engine looks as good as it is, and how nice to see all the wires and cables, which in the normal car run wildly everywhere, neatly channelled to their appointed functional place.

TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Base comic (6).
4 Nearby pub? (5).
7 Newcomer to the trail! (10).
8 Ancient and exhausted city? (4).
9 You can't make him drink! (5).
11 Man of the road? (7).
13 Novice (7).
15 Entertaining building? (5).
17 Kidney-shaped seed (4).
18 Pirates (10).
20 Negotiate terms with him (5).
21 Acrobat's gear (6).

DOWN

1 Strike repeatedly (6).
2 Perennial plant—of life (4).
3 Healing examination? (7).
4 Coniferous tree (5).
5 Murmur like a dove (3).
6 Turning machine (5).
7 Playful absentee (6).
10 Grazing grounds (6).
12 Closest (7).
14 Regenerates (6).
15 Riding-dress (5).
16 Smallest (5).
17 Card game (4).
19 Pigtail (3).

(Solution on page 159)

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (OCTOBER ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Befogged.* 8, *Oswestry.* 10, *Carbonari.* 11, *Plotless.* 13, *Gets off.* 15, *Icecaps.* 18, *Meaty.* 19, *Peso.* 20, *Agile.* 21, *Oder.* 23, *Mater.* 24, *Roberta.* 25, *Firearm.* 26, *Caryatid.* 30, *Pygmalion.* 31, *Mona Lisa.* 32, *Decently.*

Down. 1, *Backgammon.* 2, *First water.* 3, *Geology.* 4, *Dorp.* 5, *Jest.* 6, *Stye.* 7, *Ayes.* 9, *Silver-leaf.* 12, *Lapp.* 14, *Finger-tips.* 16, *Septuagint.* 17, *Board-money.* 22, *Ropy.* 23, *Margate.* 26, *Camp.* 27, *Rand.* 28, *Axle.* 29, *Dyad.*

SOLUTION TO THE PUZZLE ON PAGE 19

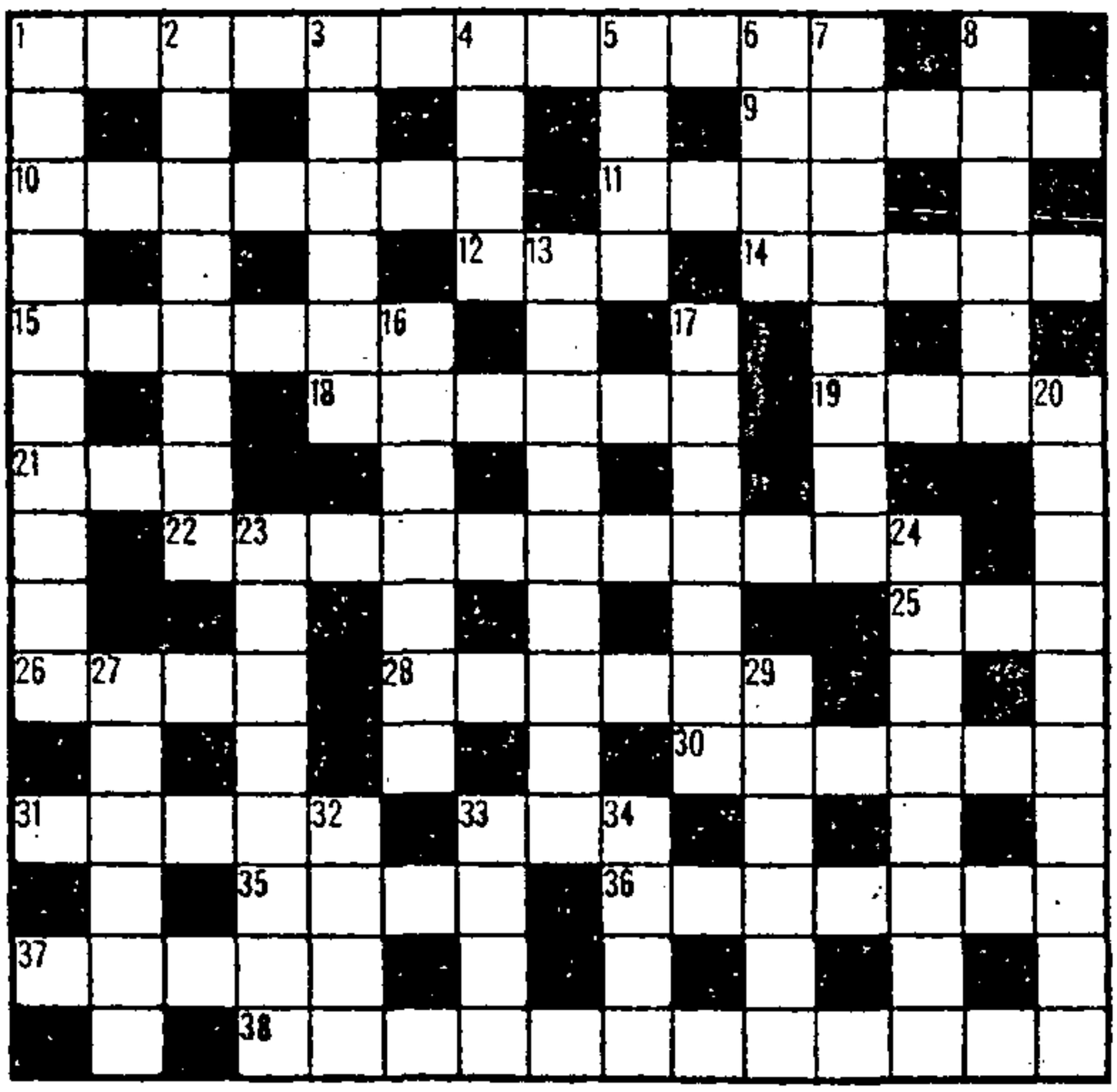
Gladys, 16; Muriel, 24; Tom, 32.

Since G. abstained for more than 2 days, M. abstained for at least 8 more than G., and T. for 16 more than G.

R. M. Lucey

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 After-dinner port and pal is confused! (12).

9 It was touch and gold for him! (5).

10 Goods are often lost in it (7).

11 Debatable point (4).

12 I'm soft, like a child (3).

14 Baby bird? (5).

15 Drink in Tagore (6).

18 Steer clear of this vehicle! (6).

19 Square for engagements! (4).

21 Nay, say not so! (3).

22 Briefly, where seed grows (2, 1, 8).

25 India is poetic (3).

26 Chinese dog food? (4).

28 Forked fish-spear (6).

30 Coiled, it may be vicious! (6).

31 Rage about rubbish in MS. (5).

33 Ruling party (3).

35 "Hath not a Jew ——?" (*Merchant of Venice*) (4).

36 Like robbery in the main (7).

37 Gross root (5).

38 Book to go with the sackcloth and ashes? (12).

DOWN

1 Quietly Roman city rebuilt — name? (10).

2 Ship illegally in China? (8).

3 Pious hags back Moses' Mount (6).

4 It's a sparkling wine (4).

5 Cast this to discourage (4).

6 Am outsize—so's he! (4).

7 On the shore (8).

8 Senior nurse finds arm not mended (6).

13 Two fathoms deep for this author! (4, 5).

16 From 13 to 19 (7).

17 Birds with soft sheen (7).

20 Kind of buttercup (10).

23 All points to dance and a film (8).

24 Little book of words, what else! (8).

27 Sandwich for track favourite? (6).

29 "There is a —— in the woods" (Wordsworth) (6).

32 Sound of shoveller bird? (4).

33 Fair in the Shetlands? (4).

34 Find the place (4).

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